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GRAMOPHONE

SOUNDS OF AMERICA

A special eight-page section focusing on recent recordings from the US and Canada

GRAMOPHONE *talks to...*

Laura Karpman

The American film composer on bringing Langston Hughes to life

What attracted you to Langston Hughes's poem 'Ask Your Mama: 12 Moods for Jazz'?

When I came across *Ask Your Mama* in a bookstore, my jaw dropped. There was this profoundly amazing patriotism through truth that I found myself gravitating towards. The poem flits back through time – it's about multiple generations – but it's also about home; 'Mama' is America. His portrayal of the African-American experience doesn't always make comfortable reading but that's OK. It has an emotional resonance that's as relevant today as it was in 1961 when he wrote it.

Why did it beg to be set to music?

In the right-hand margins, Hughes describes how the accompanying music should sound. These directions range from exact to poetic, and I thought, 'Oh god, it's like writing a film score with the most brilliant director ever'. There was talk of Hughes collaborating with the musician Margaret Bonds but so far as I know the text hasn't been set vocally until now.

It must have been a mammoth task...

In his introduction to the poem, Hughes talks about his chosen leitmotifs – this is a very

careful use of language, and by co-opting a classical term in reference to jazz, he's establishing the 'cultural mash-up' that this work represents. As per Hughes's instructions, I use the *Hesitation Blues* as a recurring theme, and I follow each 'Ask Your Mama' line with the *Shave and a Haircut* figurine.

But Hughes isn't always so specific...

That's true. What does he mean by 'piano variations on German Lieder'? I sat down with Jessye Norman – who sang the first three performances of this work – and she said, 'Let's find places where my songs meet with Leontyne Price's [whom Hughes references].' So we chose Schubert's *Gretchen am Spinnrade*. Jessye also suggested *Vow to the Lord* for when Hughes asks for 'Gospel music with a very heavy beat', and *Deep River* for the 'Bird in Orbit' section of the poem.

You use samples plus live musicians...

For the pre-recorded material I researched and collated a playlist. For example, when Hughes asks for 'happy blues' music, I use Ella Fitzgerald's *Happy Blues* – a perfect choice. And I use the voice of Hughes himself.



But I also wanted the living embodiment of Hughes, which is why I have these current artists performing live – The Roots' vocalist Black Thought, the rapper Medusa – who are joined by Nnenna Freelon, today's Nina Simone, and sopranos Janai Brugger and Angela Brown. It's so satisfying that all these musicians can live together in one sonic space.

How do you assert your own voice when you're referencing so many others?

The trick is finding yourself within the parameters that have been set. There's a huge orchestra, so my voice is still there! I grew up playing classical and jazz, and I'm a media composer so I can follow instructions; that's what drew me to this project – I felt like I could accomplish the task Hughes had in mind.

Etler • Welcher

'Fate and Fire'

Etler Woodwind Quintets – No 1; No 2

Welcher *The Moerae*^a. Woodwind Quintet No 2

Westwood Wind Quintet with ^aLisa Bergman *pf*
Crystal Records © CD790 (60' • DDD)



Crystal Records is the go-to place for wind and brass chamber repertoire. The

label, which has released more than 100 recordings, was created in 1966 by oboist Peter Christ, a founding member of

the Westwood Wind Quintet. Crystal's newest disc features the Westwood and pianist Lisa Bergman in fine performances of music by Alvin Etler and Dan Welcher, who share stylistic traits without sounding at all the same.

Etler (1913-73) composed his Woodwind Quintets Nos 1 and 2 in the mid-1950s, though they don't possess a whiff of the avant-garde academism of the period. Both works are in four movements, taking Bartók's slow-fast-slow-fast architecture as a model. A student of Hindemith, Etler absorbed his teacher's meticulous craftsmanship while going his own direction in terms of compact structures and fresh

tonal language. Each quintet is generous in thematic and rhythmic personality, and Etler hews to traditional harmony even as – in the Second Quintet – he adds spicy dissonances.

The booklet-notes reveal a charming connection between Etler and Welcher. The latter was working as a waiter in Montana in the summer of 1968 when the former sat down to dine. Whatever the link, Welcher is his own musical man, with an appealing narrative character whether the music is serious or playful. *The Moerae* (2005-06) is a fantasy for flute, oboe, bassoon and piano that vibrantly evokes the mythological Greek tale of the three fates. The three movements of Welcher's Woodwind Quintet No 2

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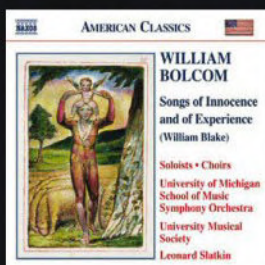
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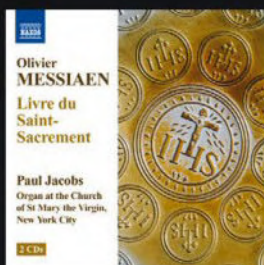
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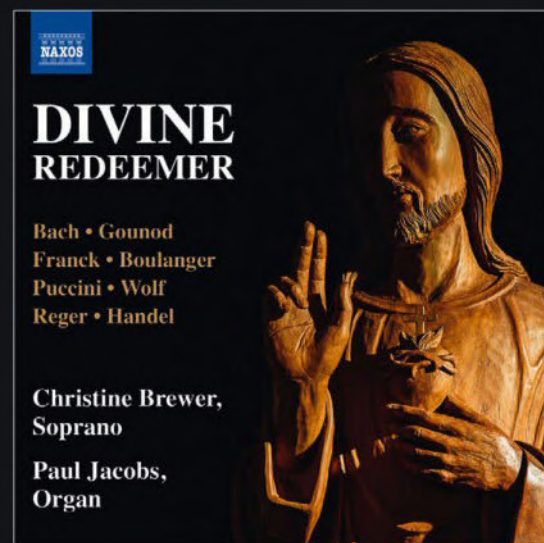
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'A mash-up of jazz, carnivale, film, opera and poetry slam': Laura Karpman's 'Ask Your Mama' recorded in San Francisco

(1977) are built on classical structures that enchant at every poetic or colourful turn of phrase. **Donald Rosenberg**

Karpman

Ask Your Mama

Angela Brown, Janai Brugger *sops* Nnenna

Freelon *voc* Blackthought, Questlove, Medusa

hip-hop artists San Francisco Ballet Orchestra /

George Manahan

Avie (M) ② AV2346 (101' • DDD)



Be prepared for sensory overload while listening to *Ask Your Mama*, a

sprawling work with music by Laura Karpman set to Langston Hughes's eponymous epic poem. As a programme note describes it, the piece is 'a mash-up of jazz, carnivale, film, opera and poetry slam'. The premiere recording of *Ask Your Mama* can't include the film, but the rest of this audacious, mesmerising and exhausting creation is intact.

Hughes wrote the poems in 1961 under the title *Ask Your Mama: 12 Moods for Jazz* to reflect not only his love of this wide-ranging genre of music but also to probe many aspects of African-American experience. Written entirely in capital letters, the text includes Hughes's

annotations about instruments, songs and even artists he admired.

Karpman's setting of the poems takes Hughes's suggestions at his word, preserving his musical wishes and employing recordings of major figures (including Ella Fitzgerald, Shirley Temple, Marian Anderson and Louis Armstrong) in a continuous weave of styles. Schubert and others rub shoulders with hip-hop and bebop; at one point, a snippet from 'Gretchen am Spinnrade' can be heard in overlapping recordings by Anderson, Leontyne Price and Jessye Norman.

As a composer who works primarily in film, television and video games, Karpman has developed the skill to shift musical gears with ease. Her contributions to *Ask Your Mama*, in line with Hughes's specific instructions, emerge more as extensions of the sources than as something truly original. But the melding of poetry (much of it recited by Hughes himself) and eclectic sonic languages is seamless and often powerful.

The score requires an enormous aggregate of performers from many musical worlds, and the recording doesn't stint on distinguished artistry. Conductor George Manahan, who has been involved with the piece since its Carnegie Hall premiere in 2009, ties all of the strands together with authority. The San Francisco Ballet Orchestra are keenly responsive to the music's diverse hues, poetic flights and bursts of energy. And the array of soloists,

from soprano Angela Brown and Roots drummer Questlove to the recorded voices of musical icons, could hardly sound more apt in illuminating the dual visions of Hughes and Karpman. **Donald Rosenberg**

Kern

Show Boat

Heidi Stober *sop* Magnolia Hawks

Michael Todd Simpson *bar* Gaylord Ravenal

Bill Irwin *sng* Cap'n Andy Hawks

Patricia Racette *sop* Julie La Verne

Morris Robinson *bass* Joe

Angela Renée Simpson *sop* Queenie

Harriet Harris *sng* Parthy Ann Hawks

Kirsten Wyatt *sng* Ellie Mae Chipley

Chorus and Orchestra of San Francisco Opera /

John DeMain

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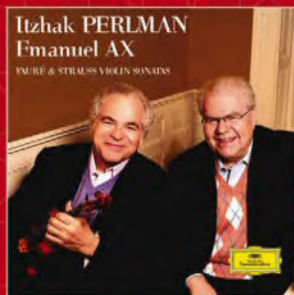
Bonus material: interviews with artists



What's a *Show Boat* lover to do? There are so many versions of the seminal Jerome Kern/Oscar

Hammerstein II musical that a theatre or opera company must wrestle with myriad

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Yundi
CHOPIN PRELUDES
Pianist Yundi returns to Chopin, the composer he is most closely identified with, for his new album. Winning the International Warsaw Chopin Competition in 2000 propelled Yundi to international fame, and his interpretations of Chopin have never failed to impress. 028948119103



Emerson String Quartet; Renée Fleming
BERG & WELLESZ
This release unites on record for the first time soprano Renée Fleming and The Emerson String Quartet for a journey into the twilight world of 1920s and 30s Vienna. The album features Berg's intricate *Lyric Suite* and Wellesz's *Sonnets by Elizabeth Barrett-Browning*, sung in German translations by Rainer Maria Rilke. 028947952589

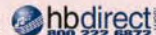
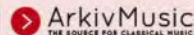
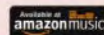


Max Richter
FROM SLEEP
Composer and performer Max Richter's newest work is *SLEEP*, an eight-hour lullaby and exploration of music, consciousness and human connectivity. Performed by piano and strings with subtle electronic touches and vocals, this new work is meant to be slept through. *From SLEEP* is a one-hour selection which Richter describes as "a different trip through the same landscape." 028947952589



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Jerome Kern and Oscar Hammerstein's *Show Boat*, 'staged with purposeful energy and intimacy' at San Francisco Opera in a production now on DVD

issues before putting anything onstage. One thing is for sure: the fact that the 1927 work embraces elements of operetta and musical theatre makes it an ideal vehicle for extravagant treatment, as can be discerned in the 2014 San Francisco Opera production captured on this DVD. As staged by Francesco Zambello with purposeful energy and intimacy, the human dramas that unfold on and off the stage of the *Cotton Blossom* are brought to thrilling life.

Lyricist-librettist Hammerstein's adaptation of the Edna Ferber novel gets into theatrical trouble in Act 2, when the narrative tries to cover several decades of social history via too many interweaving stories. But the San Francisco production is so colourful, swift and musically assured that a viewer can bask in Kern's glorious music while suspending the requisite disbelief and enjoying the overall gorgeousness. The glory begins in the pit, where John DeMain conducts an urgent and flexible account of the score in Robert Russell Bennett's original orchestrations.

All of the principals are up to the tasks before them, starting with Patricia Racette, an impassioned and poignant Julie, who makes the most of her Act 2 song, 'Bill' (lyrics by PG Wodehouse). As Joe, Morris Robinson applies vocal gold to 'Ol' Man River,' which he happily reprises toward

the end of the show, and Angela Renée Simpson fills the part of his mate, Queenie, to the lusty and touching brim. Michael Todd Simpson makes an ideal Gaylord – dashing, vulnerable and possessed of a glowing baritone. Heidi Stober is a gleaming and affecting Magnolia, especially in the conflicted moments in Act 2.

The work's comic roles are deftly handled, from Bill Irwin's rubber-bodied Cap'n Andy and Harriet Harris's ornery Parthy to the bright vaudeville team of Kirsten Wyatt (Ellie Mae) and John Bolton (Frank). And hats off to the San Francisco Opera Chorus, who nudge *Show Boat* magnificently into the realm of opera.

Donald Rosenberg

JM Stephenson

The Devil's Tale

Matt Bean narr **Western Illinois University Faculty Chamber Players / Mike Fansler**
Ravello © RR7906 (54' • DDD)



James M Stephenson's imaginatively conceived and well-executed sequel to

Stravinsky's *L'histoire du soldat*, for the same narrator and seven instruments, takes place in an incongruous time warp between Las

Vegas, Nevada and Tulsa, Oklahoma.

It is an entertaining 55-minute theatrical compression of homespun Midwest sensibility, compositional virtuosity and superb instrumental playing.

While Stephenson kept the Stravinsky instrumentation, he abandoned the original Ramuz story and with it the solo violin; he added a part for Joe's girlfriend along with three exhilarating dances, and a happy if subdued ending; as for the book, which Stephenson decided 'to rhyme, but leave the rhythm rather loose', no shadow of war hangs over this surprisingly dour *Devil's Tale*. Overall, it is effectively Stravinskian in the tension it engenders between the straightforward, flatly narrated story and the highly charged score, despite its minimalist instrumentation, with the naive charm of Broadway in its DNA.

In addition to quotes from Stravinsky, Stephenson incorporates into his own music and transforms a range of influences, from Prokofievian bassoons to echoes of Bernard Herrmann and Jerry Goldsmith. As a bonus, each of the short but brilliant Three Dances, rollicking with elements of American circus, would make a brilliant encore to performances of the *Histoire* itself.

Adding to the sense of event, the seven Western Illinois University faculty members conducted by Mike Fansler, working hand-in-glove with narrator Matt

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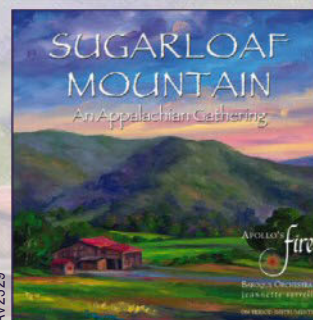
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Apollo's Fire, whose new disc on Avie 'asks questions about life and death, and bores into the American national psyche'

Bean, give a tangible feeling of original-instrument creators putting together music for the first time, aided by an excellent recording made at Tri State Public Radio in Macomb. **Laurence Vittes**

Tower

Chamber Dance. Stroke. Violin Concerto^a

*Cho-Liang Lin *vn* Nashville Symphony

Orchestra / Giancarlo Guerrero

Naxos American Classics © 8 559775 (58' • DDD)



Joan Tower has written music in many genres, and she's particularly potent when exploring the expressive and colouristic possibilities of the symphony orchestra. The three Tower works on this new recording by the Nashville Symphony under Music Director Giancarlo Guerrero reveal the composer's ability to travel a spectrum of emotions and atmospheres, from poetic delicacy to thunderous drama.

The most poignant piece is the most recent. Tower wrote *Stroke* in 2010 as a tribute to her younger brother, whose experiences of being stricken and working his way through recovery are depicted in a series of vivid sonic episodes. The music alternates between violent spasms and moments of touching lyricism, with the full resources of the orchestra used to prismatic and penetrating effect.

Tower's Violin Concerto (1991) also abounds in contrasting moods. The soloist is called upon to perform daring feats against orchestral chatter and exult in poetic material. It's a lush and powerful score, as well as a portrayal of a lonely figure engaging in philosophical conflicts in the cadenzas. Another piece from the past decade, *Chamber Dance* (2006), often belies the implications of its title by summoning enormous cascades of sound and whirlwind rhythmic ideas. And then Tower switches gear to focus on individual instruments and interactions.

Guerrero shapes fervent and vital performances. In the concerto, he and the orchestra join forces with Cho-Liang Lin, who has remarkable command of Tower's intricate writing even as he exults in the moments of luminous serenity.

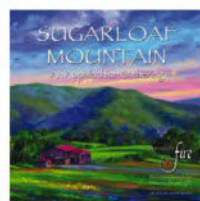
Donald Rosenberg

'Sugarloaf Mountain'

'An Appalachian Gathering'

Apollo's Fire / Jeanette Sorrell

Avie © AV2329 (69' • DDD • T)



On her ninth CD for Avie, Jeanette Sorrell and a hand-picked band of eight musicians from her Apollo's Fire Baroque orchestra – playing on penny whistle, gourd banjo and other 'period instruments', and featuring

soprano Amanda Powell and tenor Ross Hauck – tap into America's hardscrabble Southern roots with grace and power.

The poignantly lean sound profile they bring to their thematically grouped selection complements Anonymous 4's recent '1865' disc (Harmonia Mundi, 4/15) with music that asks questions about life and death, and bores into the American national psyche at similarly visceral emotional levels, most poignantly addressed in two spirituals – Hauck at his most beautiful and eloquent in 'Just before the battle, mother', and Powell searing in 'Go march along'. While the prevailing mood is of sadness and hard times, Sorrell and friends definitely know how to have fun, bringing distinctive, infectious energy to up-beat numbers such as 'The fox went out on a chilly night' and 'Oh Susanna!'. A large part of the musical success lies in the varied instrumentation by which every song signifies a personal response: using cello, fiddle and drum to back Hauck in 'Black is the color of my true love's hair' reveals its most deeply felt thoughts; Sorrell's magical, rapt harpsichord riff on 'I wonder as I wander' reveals how profoundly spontaneous this folk music is at its core.

Recorded at St Paul's Episcopal Church in Cleveland Heights, the sound loves voices and instruments equally and takes volume remarkably well; check out Tina Bergman's shimmering hammer dulcimer in 'Pretty Betty Martin'. **Laurence Vittes**

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Find out who made the shortlist in this issue on page 32

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Gramophone Awards 2015 issue – on sale September 18
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Bright futures – and poignant farewells

This issue feels very much bookended by the passage of life. As our news pages report, in late June my colleague James Jolly and I found ourselves immersed in the world of music competitions, where the young, aspiring and gifted are thrust into the heady mix of limelight, scrutiny and opportunity that would become a daily part of the career they seek. For my part, I was privileged to be a jury member of the inaugural Orchid Music Charitable Trust Young British Soloists' Competition, held in the perfect acoustic of Wigmore Hall. Competition success has always carried kudos, and traditionally a cheque, though in recent years competitions have been more focused on how to enrich their alumni's opportunities. In this case the winner – soprano Louise Alder – gets to make an album for Orchid Classics, which seems an ideal way to foster familiarity with the art of recording in tomorrow's stars, as well as to offer an impeccable calling card at this crucial point in their lives.

In St Petersburg, meanwhile, James was presenting online coverage of the Tchaikovsky Competition for **medici.tv**. The contest has attracted much attention ever since Van Cliburn's win in 1958 – but that two million people worldwide watched nine million broadcasts over the fortnight must have surpassed everyone's expectations. The web – whether through live opera streams to cinemas, or offering those new to classical music playlists to guide them through an otherwise alienatingly large catalogue – is transforming the way music reaches people. As the Tchaikovsky Competition statistics demonstrate,



Martin

there is an appetite out there for classical music online: those with the imagination can, and are, both reaching and growing that audience.

But it's also been a poignant month, as our obituaries pages reflect. Edward Greenfield was one of *Gramophone's* longest-serving critics, whose recollections as a writer could take readers back to events, sessions and people that for most others were historical episodes from a past generation. A life devoted to passionate and eloquent advocacy for musicians and music-making was one well spent, and the beneficiaries are the millions who throughout those many decades will have enjoyed his broadcasting or read his reviews, and consequently listened to recordings they might not otherwise have heard. It's a mission *Gramophone* will continue to honour. Then a week or so later followed the death of a musical giant who contributed so much to the world which EG surveyed. Tenor Jon Vickers was a figure who, for those of us too young to have seen him perform, had assumed a legendary status in the catalogue. That in a previous age such art would have been lost forever is justification enough for the medium we report on, and for the continued support of such projects as the studio *Aida* we also cover in this issue. So while we mourn the passing of greats, let us reflect that perhaps the best respect we can show for their legacy is to look ahead, to support the next generation, whether championing the remarkable talent of tomorrow or capturing today's stars for posterity in recordings, so that the future may be enriched by what was achieved today.

martin.cullingford@markallengroup.com

THIS MONTH'S CONTRIBUTORS



'Narrowing 80 recordings of the *Diabelli* Variations down to 20, I was surprised to find essentially

no surprises, although I regret that certain favourites remain in catalogue limbo,' says **JED DISTLER**, who writes this month's Collection. 'If anything, the reference versions seem to loom larger over time.'



'Much has happened since I first encountered the 12-year-old Simon Rattle playing Mozart's

Piano Concerto K488 at a summer school near Vienna,' recalls **GEOFFREY NORRIS**, who interviewed the London-bound conductor for the cover story in this issue. "This boy will go far," we all said.'



'We tend to associate British folksongs in classical music with a narrow 20th-century window in time,'

says **ALEXANDRA COGHLAN**, who has written this month's Specialist's Guide, 'so it was wonderful to explore the far longer and more disparate relationship between the two genres, starting with Taverner and going right through to today.'

THE REVIEWERS Andrew Achenbach • Nalen Anthoni • Tim Ashley • Mike Ashman • Philip Clark • Alexandra Coghlan • Rob Cowan (consultant reviewer) • Jeremy Dibble • Peter Dickinson • Jed Distler • Duncan Druce • Adrian Edwards • Richard Fairman • David Fallows • David Fanning • Fabrice Fitch • Jonathan Freeman-Attwood • Caroline Gill • David Gutman • Christian Hoskins • Lindsay Kemp • Philip Kennicott • Richard Lawrence • Andrew Mellor • Ivan Moody • Bryce Morrison • Jeremy Nicholas • Christopher Nickol • Geoffrey Norris • Richard Osborne • Stephen Plaistow • Peter Quantrill • Guy Rickards • Malcolm Riley • Marc Rochester • Julie Anne Sadie • Edward Seckerson • Hugo Shirley • Pwyll ap Siôn • Harriet Smith • David Patrick Stearns • David Threasher • David Vickers • John Warrack • Richard Whitehouse • Arnold Whittall • Richard Wigmore • William Yeoman

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JAMES JOLLY, GRAMOPHONE 2015



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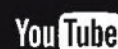
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An exhilarating collection

The seven fabulously inventive concertos for solo harpsichord and orchestra mark a key stage in the history of the concertante form. The set was compiled during Bach's Leipzig years, when he directed the city's Collegium Musicum, and requires unfailing virtuosity and imagination of its performers. The contagious pleasure one feels in the interpretations of Andreas Staier and the Freiburger Barockorchester restores the full range of meanings to the word 'play'!

"Staier is unquestionably one of the most probing and thoughtful of musicians around today." **Harriet Smith, Gramophone**

"Faultless." **Anna Picard, The Independent on Sunday**

"Andreas Staier has established himself as one of the foremost solo exponents of the baroque repertoire"
Anthony Holden, The Observer

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GRAMOPHONE *Editor's choice*

Martin Cullingford's pick of the finest recordings from this month's reviews



RECORDING OF THE MONTH



RACHMANINOV. TRIFONOV

Daniil Trifonov *pf*
Philadelphia Orchestra / Yannick Nézet-Séguin
DG ④ 479 4970GH

► **TO READ**
JEREMY NICHOLAS'S REVIEW, TURN TO PAGE 36

'Up there with the very best,' says JN of this 2011 Tchaikovsky Prize-winner's thrilling performance of the Paganini Rhapsody – and it's impossible to disagree. High praise, too, must go to the orchestral playing under Yannick Nézet-Séguin.



GRIEG Piano Concerto
SAINT-SAËNS
Piano Concerto No 2
Vadym Kholodenko *pf*
Norwegian Radio Orch / Miguel Harth-Bedoya

Harmonia Mundi ④ HMU90 7629

The first of two Grieg Concertos on this page, each with a thrilling coupling – in this case Saint-Saëns's Second Piano Concerto. ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 41**



GRIEG. MOSZKOWSKI
Piano Concertos
Joseph Moog *pf*
Deutsche Radio Philharmonie / Nicholas Milton

Onyx ④ ONYX4144

Moog pairs his excellent Grieg Concerto with the lesser-known Moszkowski work, showing off his remarkable virtuosity to full effect. ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 43**



KA HARTMANN. SHOSTAKOVICH. WEINBERG
'Wartime Consolations'
Linus Roth *vn*
Württemberg Chamber Orchestra / Ruben Gazarian

Challenge Classics ④ CC72680

Following his July 2014 Editor's Choice, Roth offers another compelling disc of 20th-century music. ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 43**



LUTOSŁAWSKI
Piano Concerto.
Symphony No 2
Krystian Zimerman *pf*
Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra / Simon Rattle

DG ④ 479 4518GH

The Piano Concerto's dedicatee offers his innate understanding of the work, while this month's cover star more than justifies his renown. ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 43**



SAINT-SAËNS
Symphony No 3, 'Organ'
Jan Kraybill *org* Kansas City Symphony Orchestra / Michael Stern

Reference ④ RR136

More Saint-Saëns this month, in another fine issue from Reference Recordings, increasingly regular occupants of this page, and a label with a strong audiophile pedigree. ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 47**



SCHUMANN Piano Concerto. Piano Trio No 2
Alexander Melnikov *pf*
Isabelle Faust *vn*
Jean-Guihen Queyras *vc*
Freiburg Baroque Orchestra / Pablo Heras-Casado

Harmonia Mundi ④ HMC90 2198

Release two in the enterprising Harmonia Mundi Schumann series; Melnikov and colleagues are superb. ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 47**



D SCARLATTI
Keyboard Sonatas
Claire Huangci *pf*
Berlin Classics ④ 0300603BC

Clearly a pianist to follow, as this, Claire Huangci's second disc, offers carefully chosen Scarlatti full of impressive technical command, control and musicality.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 71**



'MORGEN!'
Michaela Schuster *mez*
Markus Schlemmer *pf*
Oehms ④ OC1833

In this emotionally varied programme, mezzo Michaela Schuster draws on her experience of the dramatic stage to offer many moving interpretations of well-chosen songs.

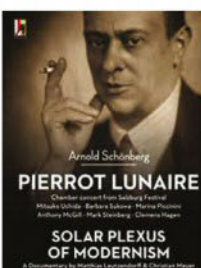
► **REVIEW ON PAGE 88**



PUUMALA Anna Liisa
Sols; Tapiola Sinfonietta / Jan Söderblom
Ondine ④ ODE1254-2D

A fairly unfamiliar name to the pages of *Gramophone* at least – but perhaps that will change following this superbly performed performance of Finnish composer Veli-Matti Puumala's powerful opera.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 95**



DVD/BLU-RAY

SCHOENBERG Pierrot lunaire
Barbara Sukowa *voc* Mitsuko Uchida *pf* et al
Belvedere ④ DVD 10130
Fascinating insights into this landmark work from musicians who understand it intimately – and prove it, too, in the performance itself.
► **REVIEW ON PAGE 85**



REISSUE/ARCHIVE SCHUBERT

'The Art of Irmgard Seefried, Vol 5'
Eloquence ④ 480 7231
A reissue series explores the German soprano's art – this all-Schubert recital is a perfect place to begin. ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 102**



Listen to many of the Editor's Choice recordings online at **qobuz.com**

FOR THE RECORD



Dmitry Masleev: First Prize-winner in the Piano category of the XV International Tchaikovsky Competition

International Tchaikovsky Competition webcasts receive nine million views

Ever since the American pianist Van Cliburn stormed his way to victory at the inaugural competition in Moscow in 1958, the International Tchaikovsky Competition has attracted the most gifted young musicians from around the world to compete for this coveted prize. This year's competition, however, was given extra significance as it broke new ground for the broadcasting of live classical music online.

For 2015, every performance from every round in all four categories was streamed live via **medici.tv**; the webcasts of the Vocal rounds from St Petersburg were presented by *Gramophone's* Editor-in-Chief James Jolly and Alexander Malich. In all, these webcasts generated in excess of nine million video views from nearly two million individual visitors worldwide. As could be expected, the webcasts were most popular in Russia (making up 29 per cent of the audience, followed by China/Taiwan with 14 per cent and the USA with 13 per cent).

The winners of the 2015 competition were announced at a ceremony in Moscow's Tchaikovsky Concert Hall. This event, which was introduced by Valery Gergiev – the competition's Chairman and the man largely responsible for the competition's revival of fortune – was dominated by a huge portrait of Tchaikovsky, the 175th anniversary of whose birth falls this year.

The Russian pianist Dmitry Masleev (b1988) took the First Prize in the piano category: a popular choice, particularly as Masleev's mother died during the competition's early rounds.

No First Prize was awarded in the Violin category: the Taiwanese Yu-Chien Tseng (b1994) was given Second Prize, with three other musicians drawing for Third Place. It was more straightforward in the Cello category, however, where the Romanian musician Andrei Ioniță (b1994) received the top honours – an almost universally popular choice. The two Vocal categories (one for each gender) were won by the Russian mezzo Yulia Matochkina (b1983) and the Mongolian baritone Ariunbaatar Ganbaatar (b1988), who also won the special Grand Prix.

The entire competition's webcasts will remain free to view at **tch15.medici.tv** until the next competition in June 2019.



Deutsche Grammophon signs countertenor Franco Fagioli

The Argentinian-born countertenor Franco Fagioli has signed an exclusive recording contract with Deutsche Grammophon. Fagioli is the first countertenor in history to sign such a contract with DG and his solo debut album, to be recorded later this year, will be released in 2016. Earlier this year Fagioli starred in a live recording of the original version of Gluck's *Orfeo ed Euridice* with conductor Laurence Equilbey and the Insula Orchestra; this recording is due for release on September 11 on DG's Archiv Produktion label.

Fagioli is no stranger to the recording studio. His most notable appearance to date is the recording of Vinci's *Artaserse* for Virgin Classics (now Erato) on which he appeared alongside fellow countertenors Philippe Jaroussky, Max Emanuel Cencic, Valer Barna-Sabadus and Yuriy Mynenko. This *Artaserse* was *Gramophone's* Recording of the Month in January 2013.

New study says classical music concerts physically reduce stress

A new scientific study based on research by the Royal College of Music's Centre for Performance Science has proved what singers and those who regularly attend classical music concerts have long known: that classical music can physically reduce stress.

The research was compiled from saliva samples, ECG monitor readings and questionnaires gathered from 15 singers and 49 audience members at a concert given by Eric Whitacre and his Singers at London's Union Chapel in March 2015. It has been shown that the audience members experienced a reduction in levels of the stress hormones cortisol and cortisone.

For the singers, the same reduction in stress hormones occurred during rehearsal but there was (predictably) an increase in both stress hormones during the performance itself.

Soprano Louise Alder wins inaugural OMCT Competition

Louise Alder has triumphed in the final of the inaugural Orchid Music Charitable Trust (OMCT) Young British Soloists' Competition, held



Soprano Louis Alder wins the OMCT Competition

at London's Wigmore Hall and sponsored by Brompton's Fine & Rare Instruments. Alder was competing against three musicians from different disciplines in the final round: pianist Evelyne Berezovsky, saxophonist Amy Green and violinist Mathilde Milwidsky. The jury comprised of clarinettist Julian Bliss, Classic FM presenter and soprano Catherine Bott, *Gramophone's* Editor and Publisher Martin Cullingford, General Manager of BBC Symphony Orchestra Paul Hughes, cellist Guy Johnston, pianist Martin Roscoe and soprano Elizabeth Watts.

Alder's prize for winning the competition is a fully funded album on Orchid Classics. Upon winning the final she said, 'I feel completely elated to be afforded the opportunity to make a disc. It's always a joy to perform at Wigmore Hall – and in front of such a distinguished panel and with such a wonderful pianist, Joseph Middleton.'

Alder is a graduate of the Royal College of Music International Opera School and a member of the Frankfurt Opera ensemble. She made her debut at the Glyndebourne Festival this season as Lucia in Fiona Shaw's production of Britten's *The Rape of Lucretia*.

Plácido Domingo's Operalia competition winners announced

This year's Operalia competition was held at London's Royal Opera House on July 19, with the finalists accompanied by the ROH Orchestra conducted by Plácido Domingo. The two First Prize-winners were the Romanian tenor Ioan Hotea and the Norwegian soprano Lise Davidsen, who were both awarded US\$30,000. Second Prizes (\$20,000) were given to Darren Pene Pati and Hye Sang Park, and Third Prizes (\$10,000) to Edward Parks and Nolvuyiso Mpofo.

John Berry, ENO's Artistic Director, hands in his resignation

English National Opera's Artistic Director John Berry has announced his decision to leave the company. In his official statement, Berry said: 'My work is now done and ENO is today regarded as one of the most creative forces in opera. The decision feels right to leave at the end of a hugely successful season both from an artistic perspective and in terms of audience numbers...After eight seasons leading the company artistically and as the award-winning 2014/15 season comes to a close, I am looking forward to spending the summer deciding on my next role. I look forward to remaining involved with ENO in the future, as an audience member and supporter.'

Acting Chairman of ENO, Harry Brünjes, paid tribute: 'John Berry's contribution to ENO over the past two decades has been phenomenal. Under his leadership, the artistic programme at ENO has been unrivalled in its quality and its ability to entertain and to innovate. He has helped build ENO a UK-wide and international reputation for excellent dramatic opera that makes us unique – introducing directors from other art forms to the world of opera.'

Edward Gardner recently conducted his final production (Tchaikovsky's *The Queen of Spades*) as Music Director of English National Opera and will be succeeded by Mark Wigglesworth next season.

John Berry received a CBE in last year's Queen's Birthday Honours list. He launched ENO Screen in 2013, in which selected productions are broadcast live into cinemas across the UK and Ireland and also worldwide.



John Berry: ENO's Artistic Director for eight seasons

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PODCASTS

Daniel Barenboim (pictured) speaks to *Gramophone's* Editor-in-Chief James Jolly about why he has decided to return to Brahms's First and Second Piano Concertos as a soloist with the Staatskapelle Berlin and conductor Gustavo Dudamel for DG.



GRAMOPHONE AWARDS 2015

This year's recording category winners will be exclusively revealed on *Gramophone's* website on August 27. The *Gramophone* Awards ceremony (at which the special Award-winners, including Lifetime Achievement, Artist of the Year and Recording of the Year will be announced) takes place on the evening of September 17 at St John's Smith Square, London. There will be live updates on *Gramophone's* website during the evening as well as via Twitter (@gramophonemag) and Facebook ([facebook.com/GramophoneMagazine](https://www.facebook.com/GramophoneMagazine)), so make sure you are following *Gramophone* for all of the latest news as it happens!

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LONDON CALLING

He may be 60 but Rattle has a flurry of recordings due out, is taking risks with repertoire, and plans to unite players and community when he heads up the LSO in 2017, says Geoffrey Norris

‘The thing about becoming 60,’ admits Sir Simon Rattle, ‘is simply wanting more free time, more time to think and read, more time to do things other than music and to bring up the family.’ Most of us, particularly those of us for whom the age of 60 is but a distant memory, will nod wisely and agree that Rattle, who passed 60 in January this year, has got it absolutely right. But wait. Is this the same Simon Rattle who, on the very evening before we meet to chat on the way to Heathrow Airport, has conducted the London premiere of the new Jonathan Dove opera *The Monster in the Maze*, contriving to control a cast and chorus of hundreds of young professionals, children and amateurs scattered all over the Barbican Hall? And is he not now on the way to Aix-en-Provence to conduct another production of it, with a different cast – and this time in French? Clearly achieving the age of 60 does not signify a pipe-and-slippers autumn. Rattle is still Artistic Director of the Berlin Philharmonic until 2018, and the year before that he will take over from Valery Gergiev as Music Director of the London Symphony Orchestra. Free time? Maybe not just yet.

Allied to the LSO music directorship, Rattle will also be Artist-in-Association with the Barbican Centre and the Guildhall School of Music and Drama. *The Monster in the Maze* was the first manifestation of the sort of thing that such a partnership might yield. ‘Certainly every year,’ says Rattle, ‘we will do one big community opera in whatever form that takes.’ Simon Halsey, who combines the choral directorship of the LSO with a parallel post in Birmingham and also heads the Berlin Philharmonic Youth Choral Programme, is a close colleague of Rattle’s, and they realised that ‘when we came to look at Britten’s *Noye’s Fludde* [which the Berlin Philharmonic, alongside students from local elementary and high schools, performed in April 2013], there were very few followers to it. There are pieces written for skilful youth orchestras and so on, but this idea that you would have enormously mixed abilities in the same piece is still very unusual, and it takes a very skilled composer to make that work.’ As Rattle says, ‘It was very clear

when we started talking [about the LSO job] that what we needed was a holistic orchestra – which is dealing with all parts of the system of music, from education to programming to community development and also developing the orchestra. The LSO,’ he reminds us, ‘has had a very long and successful collaboration with Guildhall, but it seemed time to move much closer. It’s a way of showing the world that we want to work together in as many ways as possible. Many of us went through music colleges learning wonderful things but then feeling utterly unprepared for what the reality was. And of course the reality now is that most people basically know about music from Machaut to yesterday but that they must also know how to teach, to inspire, to inspire, to share. Music is disappearing from schools. Teaching is getting less. We have to fill the gap.’

Rattle and the LSO practised what they preached by having Guildhall students alongside orchestral members in the performance of Walton’s First Symphony that followed *The Monster and the Maze*. ‘We had to give them a rather brutal crash course,’ Rattle admits. ‘It made you realise what’s to be done. Part of what I see working with the Guildhall students is to tell them, “Sorry, this is the standard. We are trying to lift our standards all the time, so you must at least come up to the standard we are setting ourselves. You, Mr X, are sitting next to somebody who’s 60 and is playing her heart out. You cannot decide just to coast.” Sometimes,’ Rattle says, ‘it’s just a matter of sitting, communicating and finding out how things work for other people. Hopefully it will slowly and surely have an effect.’ With *The Monster and the Maze* already a sign of what can be achieved, the Barbican has offered to commission further pieces in which the LSO, as Rattle says, ‘is simply involved in everything, and we would also be working with the Barbican when we go to explore other sites in London. We are in discussion with Tate Modern to do a big project. But in fact all over London there are extraordinary places to explore.’ It’s about bringing in new audiences as well as the already committed ones, and one of the things that appealed to Rattle about the performance of the Walton symphony was the positive reaction from ‘people who would not normally be





Uniting the community: Rattle rehearses Jonathan Dove's *The Monster in the Maze* at the Barbican

going to concerts. Hopefully, some of them were infected with the bug.'

The LSO and Rattle tested the water of including Guildhall students in its scheme of things by engaging four young singers in the performance of Schumann's oratorio *Das Paradies und die Peri*, given at the Barbican in January in a concert that was recorded and is soon due for release on the LSO Live label. 'When we do live recordings in Berlin,' Rattle says, 'it's always from at least three concerts. And we have the possibility of a patch. Here in *Das Paradies und die Peri* we did one or two things which we knew were tricky in rehearsals, but in effect it was the microphones just catching us on the wing – one concert, and we did nothing afterwards. But this was in a way simply what it was. It was done with an enormous amount of love, and I'm simply happy to have it out there.'

Das Paradies und die Peri, which Schumann wrote in 1843 based on a German translation of part of Thomas Moore's oriental romance *Lalla Rookh* (1817), is one of those curious

'What I love with the LSO players is that they show absolutely no sign that there's a ceiling. They seem to be willing to try and explore everything'

19th-century works that enjoyed almost fanatical popularity in its day but has only in recent times re-entered the repertoire and become more widely known through recordings by Sir John Eliot Gardiner, Nikolaus Harnoncourt and Giuseppe Sinopoli among others. Rattle, in that respect, is a comparative latecomer to the cause. 'To my absolute shame,' he confesses, 'Giulini told me about the piece when I was in my twenties. He said, "There is this astonishing piece that no one plays, and really you should have a look at it." And I didn't. You can find a performance by Giulini [currently on the Arts Archives label], and ecstatically beautiful it is. But there are not many examples in history of masterpieces that have fallen into disuse. Maybe we have a slightly queasy relationship with the text.' The text Rattle refers to tells of a peri [angel] banished from heaven and compelled to search the world for the purest gift – the tears of a penitent sinner – to earn her readmission to God's presence. 'When you read it now,' says Rattle, 'it's impossible, but of course Wagner also loved it and wrote to Schumann congratulating him for taking it on. And in its time it was almost as popular as *Messiah*. There were choral societies set up all over Europe for the express purpose of singing this piece – including one in Edinburgh. And then at the turn of the 20th century it

almost completely disappeared from performance. The Berlin Philharmonic performed it a number of times in the 19th century, and then just once in the 20th until I did it again. To my amazement I gave only the second Carnegie Hall performance in 2007. The previous one was in 1902.'

'Of course,' continues Rattle, 'the libretto is a period piece, but the libretto of *Lohengrin* is a period piece, as is *Trovatore* and so many other works. And because *Das Paradies und die Peri* was so loved and so often performed, it was also a seminal work for all of the Romantic era.' As he maintains, you can hear pre-echoes of Wagner and Mahler in it, 'but also one is very aware that Schumann was one of the first early music experts. You see how the music goes back to Schütz, to Bach, to all those composers who were in Schumann's library. One of

the things I find endlessly touching is that at the point where he gives a metaphor of what it takes to get into heaven or to be remembered or noticed, Schumann quotes Bach – the exact opposite, say, of Strauss in *Ein Heldenleben*. You learn so much about who Schumann was by this selfless gesture. And the score also rather gives the lie to the idea that Schumann had problems orchestrating. It's so full of colours. In performance, because you have the words, you can follow the weight of the words. It simply cannot be performed *gleich* [uniformly]. It has to be phrased at all moments, and in a way the words help you.'


If Rattle was cavalier with Giulini's advice, he took more notice of Gardiner. 'He did exactly what I should have done,' Rattle says. 'He was in Leipzig and he found a vocal score and he simply played it through and realised how wonderful it was. I know of *Das Paradies* through him and through some of the people who played it, and they all told me, "You have got to look at this". Back came my Giulini shame. Wherever I've taken the piece, the musicians have been thrilled by it. When we played it in Berlin, it somehow seared into us because the first performance happened on the day that a very, very deeply loved member of the orchestra died suddenly. We were all so shaken. We learnt of his death an hour before the performance. And listening to these words about a journey, everything seemed to be talking to us directly. Like *The Dream of Gerontius*, it's a journey of the soul. And somehow the text made much more sense when you thought about it personally. With Schumann you absolutely have to think personally. He's so different from Wagner. He has no wish to dominate. There's a wish to be private – candid and private at the same time.'

The next recording project with the LSO will be Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande* in 2016, produced by Peter Sellars whose staging of Bach's *St Matthew Passion* Rattle conducted with the Berlin Philharmonic at last year's BBC Proms. 'We'll be able to do what Debussy wanted,' says Rattle, 'which was to have *Mélisande* die among the violins. Debussy had wanted the orchestra to be on stage, but no one would allow him, so we thought we'd give him his wish.' If no other recordings with the LSO have yet been filmed up, September sees the release on the Berlin Philharmonic's own label of the complete cycle of Sibelius symphonies. The BPO has history with Sibelius, because Herbert von Karajan, Principal Conductor for 35 years, was one of the composer's most ardent exponents. But there has been a gap. As Rattle explains, 'Karajan, towards the end of his life, didn't perform Sibelius, and Claudio [Abbado, Rattle's predecessor in Berlin] loathed it.' Guest conductors, Rattle suggests, don't want to risk playing something with which the

Berliners are unfamiliar. 'Basically everybody wants to conduct Bruckner's Eighth and *Heldenleben*. Nobody is likely to come and conduct the orchestra in pieces in which they might be uncomfortable. But it's my job to spread the boundaries.' Hence the Sibelius set. 'As we've played Sibelius's music more and more,' says Rattle, 'it's fascinating hearing an orchestra with its particular tradition grapple with music that is very strange for the players. But interestingly some of it is less strange than others. They all got the Fourth Symphony immediately, and that one I think for many of them is absolutely the favourite, the one which in the UK and America is the hardest to perform. But in a way, if you take *Parsifal* and put it in a trash compactor, you have in the nine minutes of the Sibelius's first movement an hour's worth of *Parsifal*-like gestures. It gives you a similar feeling of weight and depth.'

As to the other symphonies, someone apparently suggested to Rattle that the Berlin Philharmonic played the Third exceedingly well but that it sounded like somebody speaking a foreign language phonetically. 'But when I listen,' says Rattle, 'there are so many beautiful things. There's often a kind of sweep and feeling for the long phrases that's very unusual. Certainly there's no way that you can get the Berlin Philharmonic to play an icy, Nordic version of Sibelius, because that is simply not what they do. On the other hand, you can get the red-hot part of the spectrum, and that is one way of packing that suitcase. I do think it's great enough music to take all those interpretations. There was an idea that recordings were supposed to be definitive. That I can't claim. But it is a view. What has pleased me is the feeling from more and more of the players that this is really wonderful music.'

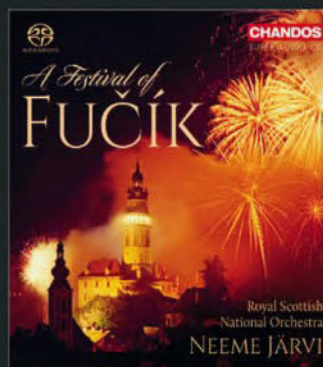
When Rattle takes over at the LSO, he will spend four months with the orchestra spread over the year. 'They are desperate to rehearse,' says Rattle in response to my point that Gergiev has not been conspicuously rigorous in that regard. 'Gergiev is not perhaps too concerned with the dental hygiene of the job, but that is simply part of what we have to do. The orchestra is happy to get down there and work. They concentrate, they are rhythmically disciplined, so much so that it is easy to make a *rubato* because the idea of pulse is so strong. Of course, Gergiev has given them certain colours that they never had before, together with evermore flexibility and the possibility that things just happen on the spur of the moment.' Russian music – 'such a skill set of theirs, as it always was under Previn and Abbado' – will still be in the frame under Rattle's leadership. 'It will also be wonderful to bring them back to the French repertoire, which with Pierre Monteux was extraordinary. They should play everything. There's so much to do in every angle, from early music to all kinds of areas of Romantic music, to contemporary works. What I love with the LSO players is that they show absolutely no sign that there is a ceiling. They seem to be willing to try and explore everything. They have skill plus a sense of humour – which really helps.'

Rattle will have a home in London, but will continue to live in Berlin. 'We are settled there,' he says. 'The kids were born there, they are all at school there, there are football clubs, double bass lessons. I also have a busy singer [Magdalena Kožená] as a wife, and in a strange way both she and I can be equally immigrant. No one is moving to someone else's country. Now that I know what London work sessions are like, I can come and work like a dog for four months, and then escape.' 

Schumann's Das Paradies und die Peri (LSO Live) and the Sibelius symphonies (Berliner Philharmoniker Recordings) will be reviewed next issue. Rattle's Lutoslawski recording on DG is reviewed on page 43

CHANDOS

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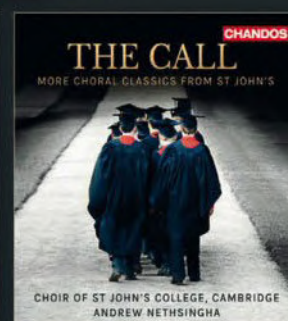


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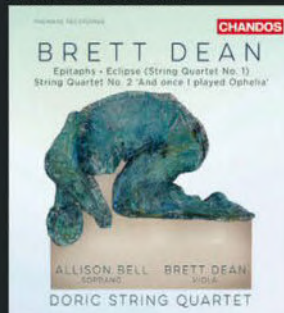
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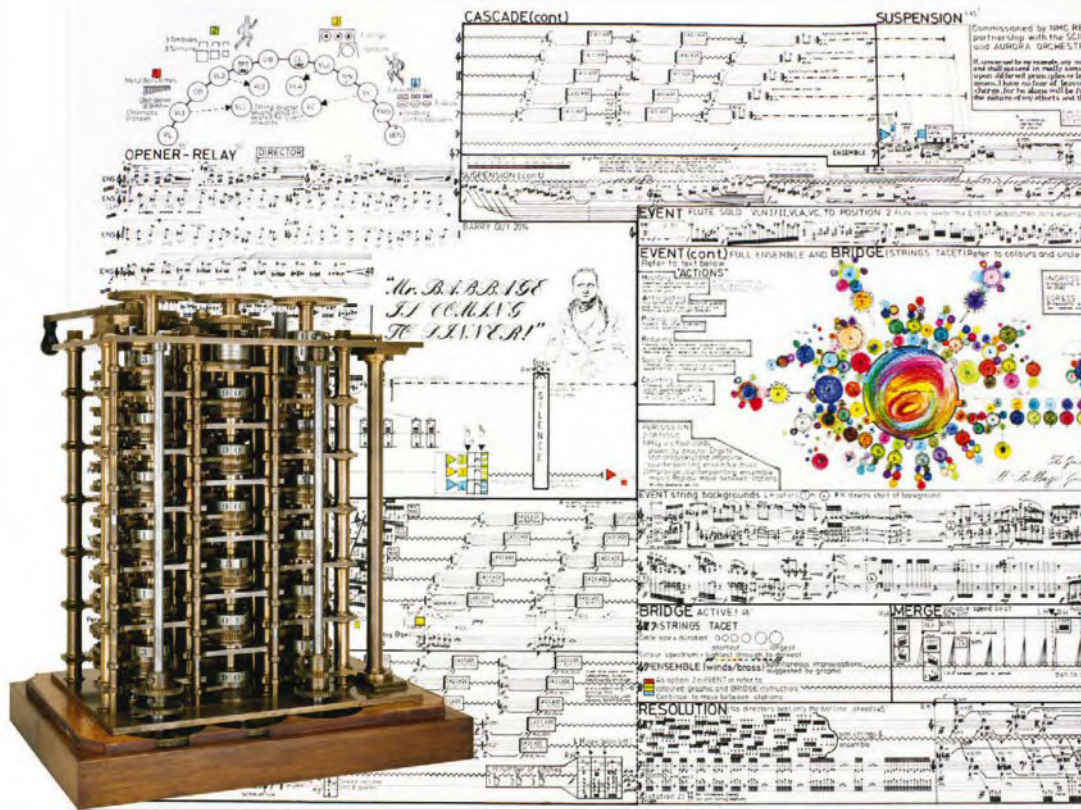
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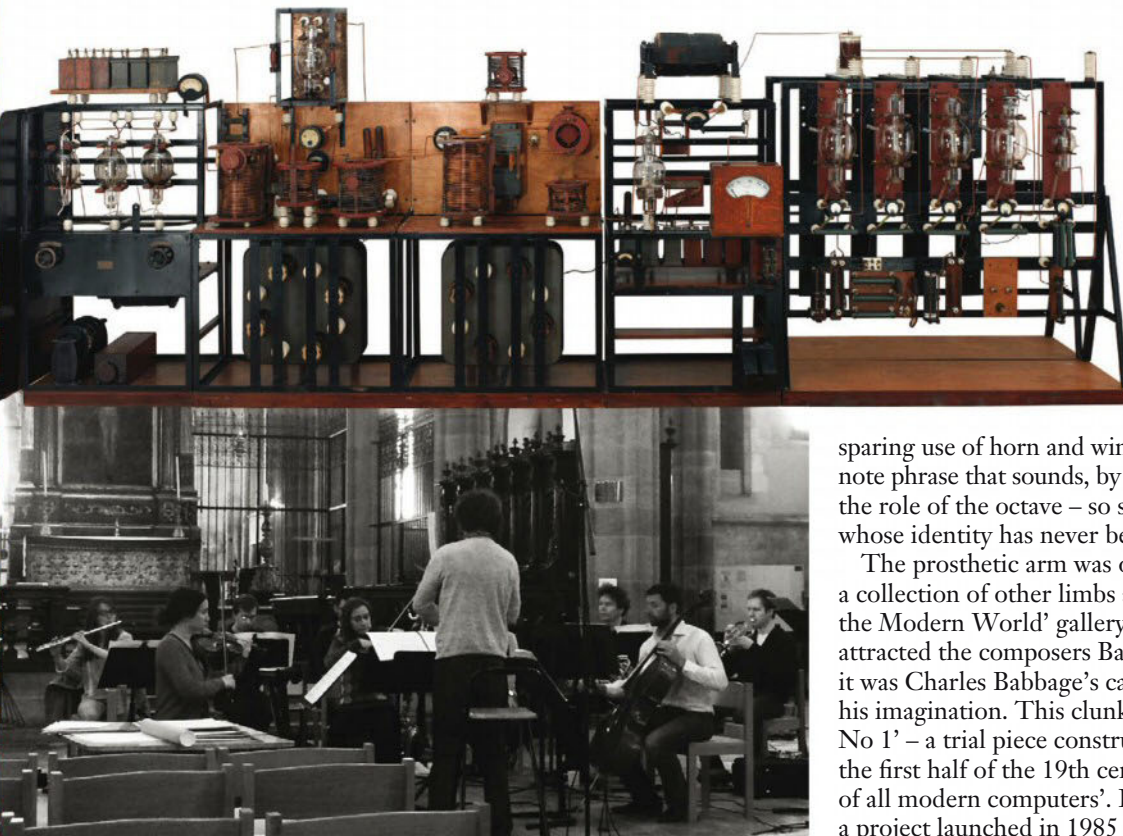
Beauty can reside in the most unusual places – even among displays of technological invention. That's the ethos behind a project by NMC, the Science Museum and Aurora Orchestra, writes Sarah Kirkup, which will see six new works performed alongside the exhibits that inspired them

Stepping into the Science Museum in South Kensington, London, is a jaw-dropping experience. Spanning seven floors and 15,000 exhibits, from giant rockets and satellites in 'Exploring Space', to the Iron Baby sculpture by Antony Gormley curled up on the floor of the 'Who am I?' gallery, this is a building which inspires greatness.

Take the vast Energy Hall, which confronts visitors as soon as they enter. Immense steam engines flank both sides of this cavernous space, their size dwarfing the enthusiasts gathering around them. Suspended from above is the Energy Ring, an interactive, 40-metre-long white LED screen wrapped around itself to form a circle of dynamic white light. It's a palpable fusion of the old and the new – these cumbersome, solid steam engines from the 18th and 19th centuries juxtaposed against a neon structure that looks like something from a science fiction movie.

The composer Thea Musgrave was immediately attracted to the Energy Hall and all its components. 'She was very excited by it,' Dr Tim Boon, Head of Research and Public History, tells me during a bespoke tour. 'She likes doing interesting things, spatially, in her music and she saw great potential here.'

If the idea of this Edinburgh-born, California-residing octogenarian visiting the Science Museum is surprising, Boon didn't find it so. A firm believer in music as 'the most wonderful example of how technology and culture interact', he has been – since the inauguration of the museum's new war memorial in 2008 at which a Royal College of Music student played the Last Post ('an extraordinary experience in this acoustic') – part of 'a quiet campaign to get the museum recognised as a musical place'. As for Musgrave, she's just one of several composers Boon has hosted at the museum over the past few months. All were there under the instruction of NMC, the record label which, as part of its 25th anniversary celebrations this year, has devised 'Objects at an Exhibition'. Loosely based on Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition*, this project – in partnership with the Science Museum and Aurora Orchestra – has several strands, the most significant of which is to record and perform (promenade-style) six new works; each one is approximately 10 minutes in length and based on an exhibit, or area, at the museum. The pieces were recorded back in May for release on September 18, and will be premiered at a ticketed



From far left, clockwise: Charles Babbage's Difference Engine No 1, and Barry Guy's score inspired by it; the Energy Ring in the Energy Hall; the 2LO, the BBC's first transmitter; Nicholas Collon and Aurora players in session at All Saints, Tooting

evening concert at the Science Museum on October 3, when the audience will be able to experience each work alongside the object or setting that inspired it.

For Nicholas Collon, Aurora's Principal Conductor, it's been a most welcome, if unusual, undertaking. 'The collaboration with the museum adds a really interesting dimension,' he says, 'and to be able to record it – albeit before the first performance – is a real plus.' He admits that the promenade element will require extra organisation on the night, but although the orchestra has 15 core players, different composers have catered for different instrument combinations (of varying sizes),

'Thea Musgrave likes doing unique things, spatially, and she saw great potential here in the Energy Hall' – Dr Tim Boon, Science Museum

therefore minimising the number of times the same ensemble has to move from one location to another. Two of the composers, Claudia Molitor and Christopher Mayo, have chosen to use electronics, which adds another degree of complication – but, as Collon says, 'So long as it's set up in advance, it should all come out at the right time – with any luck!'

It would be much simpler if all six exhibits were located on the same floor, but it was important to NMC and the Science Museum that the composers weren't constrained by such practicalities; as Boon says, 'Some of the exhibits are off the beaten track but we wanted to give the musicians free rein.'

The best example of this is surely the Artificial Arm which, at the time of writing, isn't even on display – although Boon assures me that, by October, it will be (on the second floor, as part of a new medical display). For Irish composer

Gerald Barry, who found the object on the museum's website, it's 'a poignant thing. A female, one-armed pianist wore it to play in a concert at the Royal Albert Hall in 1906, and the finger stretch is fixed on the hand so that she can play octaves only – a moving and haunting image.' Barry's *The One-Armed Pianist*, for woodwind, horn, trumpet, violin, viola and cello, is similarly haunting: pared-back strings,

sparing use of horn and winds, and featuring a repeated two-note phrase that sounds, by turns, nostalgic and menacing. Later, the role of the octave – so significant for this mystery pianist whose identity has never been established – comes into play.

The prosthetic arm was originally going to be joining a collection of other limbs already on display in the 'Making the Modern World' gallery on the ground floor, an area that attracted the composers Barry Guy and David Sawer. For Guy, it was Charles Babbage's calculating machine that stimulated his imagination. This clunky yet fragile 'Difference Engine No 1' – a trial piece constructed under Babbage's guidance in the first half of the 19th century – is, says Boon, 'the ancestor of all modern computers'. Its younger sibling, the result of a project launched in 1985 to explore the practical viability of the computer pioneer's theories, is housed upstairs in 'Computing' and is, says Boon, 'like the original but on steroids'; the calculating part of the engine weighs 2.6 tonnes and consists of 4000 separate parts. Both constructions, along with Babbage's technical drawings, were of great interest to Guy, as was a screw-cutting lathe located close to the original Babbage engine. 'Barry liked the idea of how, at the beginning of the 19th century, people started to make machines to make other machines,' Boon tells me. 'This led to the idea of a self-generating piece, where one group of musicians would set off another group.'

The score for *Mr Babbage is Coming To Dinner* is almost a continuation of Babbage's work, comprising one large graphic page inspired by engineering drawings. 'It's beautiful but quite complicated,' admits Collon, even though he's no stranger to new music scores. 'I spent a lot of time chatting to Barry about it, and now it makes sense.' Unsurprisingly for a composer who works in the field of jazz improvisation, Guy has created a piece, composed for 13 musicians, that allows for freedom and spontaneity among the players, with the percussionist assuming an extremely athletic role towards the end.

David Sawer, meanwhile, was drawn to just one object in 'Making the Modern World' – a beautiful, rare mail coach dating from 1830 – and subsequently composed his *Coachman Chronos*, scored for nine instruments: clarinet, cor anglais, bassoon, cornet (doubling flugel horn), horn, violin, viola, cello and double bass. 'When Tim first took me round, it caught my eye as a beautiful thing,' Sawer tells me as we meet up halfway through my tour. 'I studied in York, so the fact that it had travelled between York and London had some resonance for me. And then I started thinking about travel and speed. There's an essay by Thomas De Quincey called *The English Mail-Coach* where the coachman falls asleep and the passenger sees an oncoming coach and thinks there'll be an accident. There's also a poem by Goethe called *Coachman Chronos* about a coach journey through the Austrian landscape – it was set by Schubert and, in fact, the instrumentation I've used is quite similar to Schubert's Octet.'

Of the six works, Sawyer's is perhaps the most conventional, in that it has a traditional, chamber music feel. The presence of the cornet and flugel horn harks back to the role of the posthorn in alerting the post house of the coach's imminent arrival, and the crisis depicted in De Quincey's essay is captured in the fast, driving metre which suddenly grinds to a halt. The work will be performed in the centre of the gallery, with the mail coach in sight. Sawyer confesses, half-jokingly, to wanting to sit inside the coach for the performance – 'and maybe we could have someone sitting on the top, throwing out the mail!' he laughs. But although he's looking forward to exploring the possibilities that a site-specific performance offers, he has always had, at the back of his mind, the idea that this piece would – despite its connection to a concrete object – have a life of its own.

It's a common dilemma for today's composers: one can spend months writing a piece, only for it to be performed once and never heard again. The NMC label is committed to new music living on through recordings and, in this project, the resulting CD is obviously a very positive way of preserving these six new works. But how much of a challenge was it for the composers to create something that works in situ, yet also by itself?

For Claudia Molitor, whose piece *2TwoLO* was inspired by the BBC's first transmitter of the same name (2LO) dating from 1922 and located in the 'Information Age' gallery, it was as natural as breathing. When I speak to her at All Saints Church, Tooting, where her piece has just been recorded – a very smooth and straightforward process by all accounts, helped in no small measure by the expertise of Aurora's musicians and the guiding hand of producer David Lefeber – she seems nonplussed by the question of whether it can have a life after the promenade concert.

'The piece starts with old archive recordings – spoken words from the BBC's first recordings,' she explains. 'It can work without the visual because instead of seeing the transmitter, you can hear it.'

I can understand why Molitor was so captivated by the 2LO. Despite, or perhaps because of, its enormous size, it has a strange technical beauty. My eye is drawn to the glass 'bubbles', around 30cm in height, that function as vacuum tubes, as well as the huge number of heavy electrical components, and, in particular, a grand oak case containing the voltmeter. But there's something almost sad about it being trapped inside a case. As Molitor points out, 'It looks fantastic but it's sitting in this vitrine, completely silent. It's like a Stradivari violin that's so precious it's kept behind glass – but what is it, if it's not being played?'

After finding out that, for the first month of the BBC license, the transmission of music was forbidden, Molitor was inspired to write a piece that plays with the idea of music that doesn't

sound like music. 'For the backing track, I've used instrumental sounds – piano, violin, cello – but not in a way that you'd necessarily be able to identify them,' she says. 'Of course, anything that you decide is music *is* music – but I was sort of thinking, "How can I convince someone into believing it's not?"' Later on in the piece, the Aurora musicians [five in total] use all sorts of techniques – rough bowing, tapping, speaking into the trombone – that you could argue were non-musical.' The work eventually morphs into more musical material and concludes with a distorted excerpt of the Largo from Handel's *Xerxes* – the first piece of music ever to be broadcast on radio.

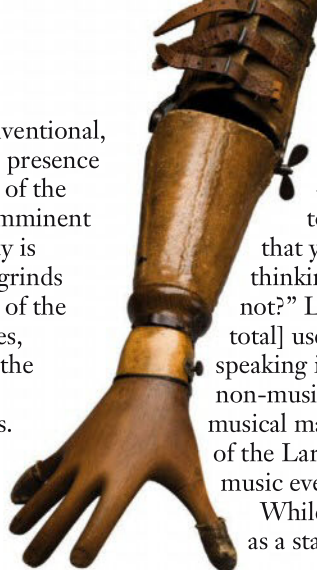
While Molitor is convinced *2TwoLO* can succeed as a standalone piece, there's no doubt that the live promenade performance will have the edge. As Boon points out to me, every space in the museum has its own individual sound, and 'Information Age' is no exception: 'In order to highlight the experience of new technology, there's a lot of voice in this gallery,' he says. Molitor agrees: 'It's a cacophony of sound – videos, recordings, kids running around,' she says. 'But for the concert the space will be silent, so we're going to record that ambience during the day and play it back into the space as the promenade audience arrives in the evening. Then it will fade out and my piece will start;

the speakers relaying the backing track are going to be positioned behind the 2LO, so it will be like it's speaking, like it's coming alive.'

Since speaking to Molitor, it transpires that not all her plans will come to fruition – there will be no ambient playback and the position of the speakers is, at the time of writing, still being negotiated. Nevertheless, I can understand why she's keen for the audience to have an immersive experience, and it's an approach shared

by Canadian composer Christopher Mayo. Mayo's piece, *Supermarine*, is inspired by the 'Flight' gallery on the third floor and, in particular, by a statue, made from more than 400,000 pieces of Welsh slate, of the British aeronautical engineer RJ Mitchell. Mitchell is most famous for having designed the Supermarine Spitfire; his Supermarine Seaplane is currently on display in this awe-inspiring space, alongside a jump jet suspended in the air and numerous other full-sized aeroplanes.

It would make sense for a piece connected with aeroplanes to be loud – and Mayo's certainly is. *Supermarine* is scored for cello, double bass and four electronic keyboards which control samplers; the twist is that, since the commission was for other instruments too – clarinet, horn, trombone and violin – it's the players of these particular instruments in Aurora who play the keyboards. 'They're controlling 20 different samples of aeroplane engines,' Mayo explains to me at the session. 'The sounds are difficult to identify to begin with – they're more like dense, harmonic chords – but gradually, as the piece goes on,



From top: the arm worn by the mystery pianist; Mayo in session; the 'Flight' gallery

they start to sound more like engines.' During the recording, in order to hear the cello and double bass, the levels are at a minimum but, for the concert, the speakers will be cranked up and Mayo hopes that the live instruments will be amplified. 'The players will be located close to Mitchell's statue, and the audience will be in front of them, surrounded by all these amazing planes,' Mayo says. 'The idea is to fill the space with sound. We've been talking about how many subwoofers we can get on the night! You'll be able to feel the sound physically.'

Like Molitor, Mayo believes his piece can have life away from the Science Museum. 'So much of what I do is linked to an extra-musical idea anyway,' he says. 'But the nice part about this project is that you get a real connection to the object by performing it in the space. To present the two things alongside each other gives listeners a whole new perspective.'

Mayo likes to think that hearing his piece as part of the promenade concert will refocus the attention of visitors on to the statue of RJ Mitchell, 'who isn't on a pedestal or anything and therefore isn't usually given much attention'. Molitor, on the other hand, won't be drawn into the effects, positive or otherwise, of hearing *2TwoLO* performed at the museum. 'I don't want to be prescriptive about what it does to people,' she says. 'The 2LO is a perfect object as it is, and it doesn't need music to enhance it – but then again, why not? There's nothing wrong with experimenting with the different ways of experiencing something. Visitors may already be familiar with the 2LO – but have they considered what might happen if it came to life again?'

'The 2LO looks fantastic but it's silent, like a Stradivari violin behind glass – what is it, if it's not being played?' – Claudia Molitor

For Boon, however, the outcome is more clear-cut: 'We can expect the music to influence the way people think about what they see here,' he says. 'It's about helping people to see better.' Boon hopes to find a way to create a legacy for this project – not just by selling the NMC CD in the Science Museum shop (which is indeed the plan), but by enabling visitors, in the long term, to hear these six pieces as they visit the objects in question – whether that's via a phone app, headphones, or otherwise. He's also keen to measure – using modern technology – the emotional response of visitors who experience music as part of their visit. 'This project has offered all sorts of tantalising opportunities,' he says. 'We'll continue to look for funding to support these ideas.'

And with that, he goes back to his desk and I return to where I started – the Energy Hall. For the performance of her piece *Power Play* (for 10 instruments including electronic keyboard), Musgrave hopes to position her players in a way that maximises the effect of being in such a large, resonant chamber. Three sections convey the inner workings of a machine's mechanisms before the fourth and final section – 'a climactic coda of the summation of the three previous independent parts' – forms 'the impact of composite energy housed in the hall'. Having heard an early edit, I can testify to the striking antiphonal effect Musgrave creates where instruments literally bounce off each other. But to hear it in this boundless space for which it was designed? Now that's an experience I'm looking forward to. **G**

For tickets to the promenade concert on Saturday October 3 at 7.45pm, visit sciencemuseum.org.uk. For more information on the project, visit nmcrec.co.uk/objects. NMC's recording will be reviewed next issue

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Pappano 'in his element' recording *Aida* with the Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia at the Sala Santa Cecilia in Rome



'A miracle!'

Aida returns to the studio

Hugo Shirley travels to Rome to witness a rare event in recent musical history – a no-expense-spared recording of a grand opera with a starry cast – and talks to its conductor, Sir Antonio Pappano

Exactly 10 years ago, *Gramophone* welcomed EMI's recording of *Tristan und Isolde* from the Orchestra of the Royal Opera House and Antonio Pappano. But in a double review in the September 2005 issue, both critics mentioned that the set, starring Nina Stemme and Plácido Domingo, was likely to be the final large-scale studio recording of an opera of its type. Happily it's a prediction that hasn't proved quite right, even if it was the last to take place at Abbey Road. Opera recordings have continued to be produced, even if many reflect two main shifts: towards the taping of live concerts and the concentration on the periphery of the repertoire. Opera Rara offers a steady flow of unusual works,

for example, many of them, such as its recent *Les martyrs*, recorded under studio conditions. Baroque operas are also well represented. This is mainly thanks to independent labels, but 2015 has also already seen lavish new sets of works by Leonardo Vinci and Agostino Steffani from Decca and Erato respectively.

On EMI, though, Pappano went on after *Tristan* to record several subsequent operas. One of them – *Madama Butterfly* in 2009 – featured the conductor's other orchestra, that of the Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia in Rome, and the tenor Jonas Kaufmann. Still, there's something particularly heartening about the latest project, now on Warner Classics, to unite conductor and orchestra with the world's most sought-after tenor: a full-scale, no-expense-spared studio recording of one of the grandest operas of all, Verdi's *Aida*, made in the luxurious environment of the Sala Santa Cecilia, the lavish 2800-seat hall in mellow curved wood and plush red at the heart of Renzo Piano's 2002 Auditorium Parco della Musica in Rome.



'Thrilling': Jonas Kaufmann (left), Anja Harteros (centre) and Antonio Pappano perform *Aida* in concert following the recording sessions

When I talk to Pappano at the end of a packed day of recording in February, his famous energy and enthusiasm seem to be further buoyed by the excitement that such a project could have finally come to fruition – 'A miracle!' he calls it, his eyes lighting up. 'It's been in the making for quite a long time, and it's been quite fraught. Operas in the studio are no longer being made – or are only being made very rarely. So to convince Warner and to find the dosh and all that stuff, that's been a struggle.

But with this cast? And in Italy? You have to ask yourself why certain recordings are made, but I think with this one that it's a no-brainer.'

Rumours about the project had abounded for years, with one indiscreet soprano even announcing herself in programme biographies as the *Aida* for the recording. Pappano laughs when I remind him of that, but is happy now to have found 'the right moment' and the 'right singers'. Kaufmann is joined by his fellow German Anja Harteros as *Aida*; Ludovic Tézier, arguably the leading Verdi baritone of the younger generation, is Amonasro; Ekaterina Semenchuk is Amneris; and bass-baritone Erwin Schrott adds extra star power as Ramfis. 'With these pieces

everybody has their favourite,' Pappano admits. 'Cossotto this and Caballé that, Leontyne Price this and Simionato that – there's nothing you can do about it. But I have singers who are known for their finesse, and there are very few singers I could do this kind of *Aida* with.'

And what sort of *Aida* is it? The answer seems to be one that captures all the subtlety of the score, without any loss of theatricality. But Pappano, the renowned man of the theatre,

is surprisingly candid when explaining why *Aida* itself was the work he wanted to record. 'It's never really done well in the theatre,' he says bluntly, referring not just to the difficulty of getting the stars of

'I've never seen a great Aida production – I don't think they exist. This recording is an opportunity to do it well' – Antonio Pappano

the necessary vocal quality into any one theatre for any length of time, but also to the basic incompatibility of the work's need for grand spectacle with modern opera houses' budgets and aesthetic outlooks. 'I've never seen a great *Aida* production, and I don't think they exist,' he tells me. 'My whole opera career has been about working with the best stage directors I possibly can, and that collaboration has been everything in my life. But here I get to do that work. Everything is in the imagination of the people involved. This is an opportunity to try and do it well.'

Pappano's last point is apparently reminiscent of some of the rhetoric that accompanied many earlier opera recordings, of the idea of creating an all-encompassing sense of aural theatre; but this set's producer, Stephen Johns, is not interested in the technological bells and whistles beloved of the John Culshaws of this world. When Johns talks to journalists in the anteroom to the hall's state-of-the-art control studio, in the bowels of the building and accessed through a maze of concrete corridors and goods lifts, he explains his own essentially non-interventionist approach. 'Electronic fakery sounds like electronic fakery,' he says. 'There are lots of recordings where they've done that. But what you want is a naturalness to the tone quality – the feeling of everybody being in the same space.'

As Johns talks to us, Kaufmann comes in looking for his bag, and also takes advantage of the opportunity to hear some of his takes from the afternoon's closed session, in which he tackled Radames's 'Celeste Aida'. Encouraging snippets of ringing top notes are heard through the door as the producer continues: 'These big studio recordings happen so infrequently and it's sad in some ways, since we have a great way of doing it now. You think about how operas were recorded in the 1960s and '70s, with people moving around on large grids, but we've developed quite a bit from that.'

When it comes to special effects, to recreating the sense of off-stage voices and musicians, simplicity is of the essence. 'We will have that sense of theatre. We did move things – we had the Egyptian trumpets in the Grand March one space back and then brought them forward. And for the *banda* – there's 40 of them – moving them forward 10 paces was easier than turning the microphones up.' He goes on to explain the challenges for the end of Act 4, *Aida* and Radames's 'O terra addio!', due to be recorded the following afternoon. 'You have to work out exactly what you want to create. This is the two lovers entombed – what does the tomb sound like? And you've also got a distant choir outside the tomb, and you've got Amneris singing too. To get those perspectives right just takes a little bit of thought. But it's always better to try and do it in the room first of all – and electronics second.'

He describes his job as that of a wicketkeeper: 'I have to catch all the ones that fly past. Tony's got phenomenal ears, though, so he's hearing things that are going wrong.' Pappano's own role, however, is perhaps more demanding than it might otherwise be. Only one of the principals, Semenchuk, has sung her role in the theatre, and there are no rehearsals with the orchestra ahead of the sessions. In the sessions I witness, however, Pappano is in his element. Each one includes a mini-masterclass, in which he talks the singers and orchestra through the scene and its key dramatic points, followed by a run-through with the orchestra



Ekaterina Semenchuk is the only soloist who has performed her role in the theatre

'Italian music is in the orchestra's DNA... they naturally somehow know what this music requires.' – Antonio Pappano

in which Pappano mixes further commentary with singing through parts of the roles himself.


The Santa Cecilia orchestra, though a symphonic one, has done opera under its previous music directors – Giuseppe Sinopoli, Daniele Gatti and Myung-Whun Chung among them. But Pappano's aim is to concentrate with the players on Italian opera specifically. 'It's important that they have contact with Italian music, because it's in their DNA, even if they haven't played this. They naturally somehow know what it requires. That's why I tell them the story, I read them the words, even if they laugh at me when I do it. I do it anyway, so that they get something. All they need is a couple of clues, and they're off.'

Rossini's *Guillaume Tell*, taped in concert, was another of the fruits on record of Pappano's operatic work with

his Rome orchestra, released by EMI in 2011. And originally the plan was to record *Aida* in concert too: 'This was supposed to be three live performances, and I said no. Because this piece is so hermetically sealed: the silences are everything. And I could never get a silent audience here in Italy – whad'ya crazy?! It would never happen!'

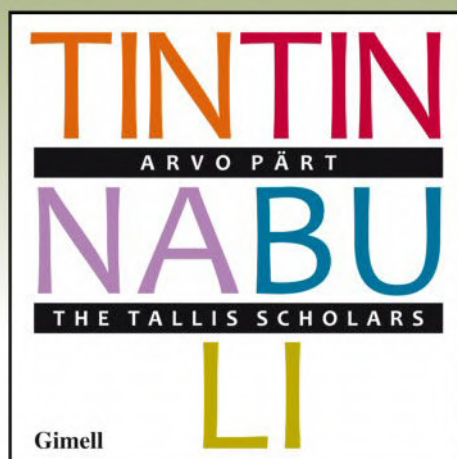
Aida is also deeper in the orchestra's DNA than it might initially seem, and the programme for the thrilling one-off concert performance that followed the sessions underlined an important historical link. In 1952, Decca produced what was arguably the first full-scale studio recording of *Aida* for LP, one of several recordings made at the end of each season since 1948 when the Sala Accademica – in the historical Accademia di Santa Cecilia building in central Rome – was turned into a recording studio; at that time, all major labels sought out an 'operatic home' in Italy, with EMI striking a deal with La Scala, RCA with the Teatro dell'Opera and Decca with Santa Cecilia.

That *Aida* was recorded with an all-Italian cast headed by Renata Tebaldi and Mario del Monaco and became for many years a staple of the company's catalogue. The fact that Pappano's all-star cast includes, in Marco Spotti's King, just one Italian among its principals might give some cause to lament the state of opera in Italy. The fact that the recording has taken place at all, however, offers cause for guarded optimism that this orchestra's new *Aida* (released on October 2) doesn't close the chapter that its first one helped open more than six decades ago.

Pappano is taking one project at a time but remains positive. 'Life is made to be, hopefully, full of surprises. Let's see what happens. If this does really well, if this is a really good project, they'll say, "Aha, it can be done! We need this much dosh. How do we do it? How do we plan for it?" It is possible, but we have to prove that the trouble, with all of these stars aligning, is worth the effort. Let's see. I think it can be.' 

► Read Gramophone's review of Pappano's *Aida* in the Awards issue

Celebrating Arvo Pärt's 80th Birthday



CDGIM 049

Total playing time: 67.06

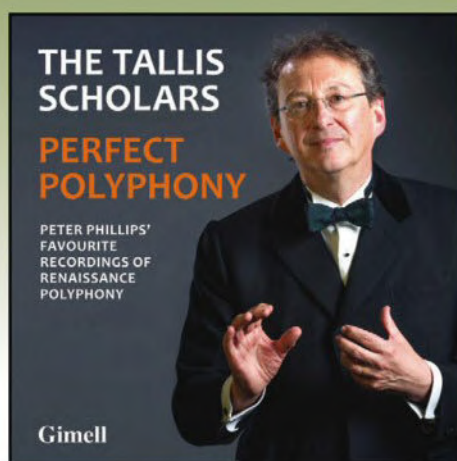
Arvo Pärt (born 11 September 1935)

Sieben Magnificat-Antiphonen · Magnificat · Which Was the Son of ... · Nunc dimittis
The Woman with the Alabaster Box · Tribute to Caesar · I Am the True Vine · Tridion

- 'An exemplary, flawless project which gives me much pleasure' Arvo Pärt
- 'A gorgeous and inspiring album' Geoff Brown, *The Times*
- 'An essential recording, not to be missed' Andrew Stewart, *SinfiniMusic.com*
- 'A sound world of profound beauty' Caroline Gill, *Gramophone Editor's Choice*
- 'A disc of quite exceptional, at times heart-stopping, beauty' Peter Quinn, *International Record Review*
- 'A wonderful achievement ... the most enjoyable, accessible Pärt collection I've come across' Graham Rickson, *TheArtsDesk.com*
- 'Stunning ... all of it is ravishing' Artistic Quality 10 Sound Quality 10 Robert Levine, *ClassicsToday.com*
- 'Truly exceptional performances, whose transparency, virtuosity and sheer vocal perfection are beyond compare' Stefano Pagliantini, *Musica*



Celebrating The Tallis Scholars' 2000th Concert



CDGIM 213

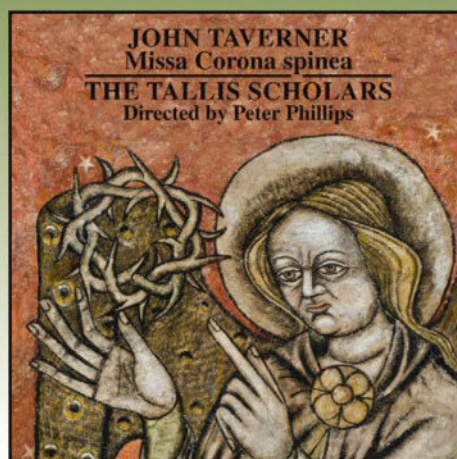
Total playing time: 2hrs 36mins

Peter Phillips' favourite recordings of Renaissance polyphony

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Victoria Versa est in luctum
Gesualdo Ave, dulcissima Maria
Mouton Salva nos, Domine · Ave Maria ... virgo serena
Gombert Magnificat 6 sexti et primi toni
Browne Stabat iuxta
Tallis Lamentations of Jeremiah I & II
Brumel Lamentations of Jeremiah
Ferrabosco Lamentations of Jeremiah
Isaac Optime pastor
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The Tallis Scholars' 2013 recording of John Taverner's *Missa Gloria tibi Trinitas* received exceptional reviews and was Number 1 in the UK Specialist Classical Chart for 6 weeks.

Now The Tallis Scholars turn to Taverner's extraordinary *Missa Corona spinea*, described by Peter Phillips as 'a kind of treble concerto, packed with mind-blowing sonorities. If ever there was music to exemplify Shakespeare's "Music of the Spheres", it is here. The first performance, probably in front of Henry VIII and Cardinal Wolsey, must have been an astonishing occasion.'

To be released on Friday 30 October 2015

SEASON PREVIEW 2015-16

Our comprehensive guide to the new concert season, featuring the best live classical music events and opera productions from across the UK, Europe and North America

UNITED KINGDOM



Helping the CBSO mark 400 years since Shakespeare's death is Principal Guest Conductor Edward Gardner — with a full concert performance of Verdi's *Falstaff*

Academy of Ancient Music

The AAM opens its season at London's Barbican with the conclusion of its three-year Monteverdi opera cycle: a semi-staged production of *Il ritorno d'Ulisse in patria* with tenor Ian Bostridge in the title-role. Another highlight is 'Vivaldi in Dresden', exploring Vivaldi's influence on a generation of German musicians, directed by Richard Egarr from the harpsichord both in London and in Cambridge, where the group is Orchestra-in-Residence.

aam.co.uk

Academy of St Martin in the Fields

The ASMF and its Music Director Joshua Bell become Classic FM's inaugural Artists-in-Residence this season, culminating in September 2016 with Classic FM Live at the Royal Albert Hall, London. Also during this season, Bell is performing in London and Cambridge as soloist and director in Tchaikovsky's Violin Concerto in D, and the Academy's founder Sir Neville Marriner will conduct the orchestra on the occasion of his 92nd birthday.

asmf.org

Aurora Orchestra

Aurora is 10 years old this season, and celebrates with two brand new London series. As resident orchestra at Kings Place, it begins 'Mozart's Piano', a five-year cycle of Mozart's piano concertos running in tandem with its informal late-night series, The Lock-In. The group also becomes Associate Orchestra at Southbank Centre, where its new series 'The Orchestral Theatre' invites the audience to join the musicians on and around the Royal Festival Hall stage as they perform.

auroraorchestra.com

BBC National Orchestra of Wales

Composer-in-Association this year is Huw Watkins, whose *London Concerto* is conducted alongside Rachmaninov's *The Bells* by Principal Conductor Thomas Søndergård in the season's opening concert. The season closes with Nicola Benedetti in Szymanowski's Violin Concerto No 2, as part of the 'Swansea Violin Series'. The Americas are coming to Wales, too, as three afternoon concerts present music anticipating the orchestra's autumn tour to Argentina, Chile and Uruguay.

bbc.co.uk/now

BBC Philharmonic

The BBC's Manchester-based symphony orchestra opens its season with Chief Conductor Juanjo Mena conducting John Foulds's *Three Mantras*. That evening also kicks off the 25th anniversary celebrations of Leonard Bernstein with Messiaen's *Turangallila-symphonie*, whose premiere he conducted. The season concludes with Vassily Sinaisky conducting Mahler's Second Symphony. Other artists include pianists Garrick Ohlsson and Kathryn Stott. Composer-in-Association is Mark Simpson.

bbc.co.uk/philharmonic

BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra

It's a big year for the orchestra, with the season bringing both its 80th birthday and an end to Donald Runnicles's reign as Chief Conductor; Thomas Dausgaard takes up the role for the 2016-17 season. Opening and closing the season falls to Runnicles, with Mahler's first and last symphonies. In between, Dausgaard will conduct Sibelius's three final symphonies. The 80th birthday concert will include a UK premiere by Matthias Pintscher, the BBCSSO's Artist-in-Association.

bbc.co.uk/bbcsso

BBC Symphony Orchestra

Chief Conductor Sakari Oramo opens the season with Mahler's Third Symphony, featuring mezzo-soprano Karen Cargill, the BBC Symphony Chorus and Trinity Boys Choir. Three complete operas are also on the menu: Leoncavallo's *Zazà*, Bellini's *Adelson e Salvini* and Louis Andriessen's *La commedia*. New music will be championed with four world premieres and nine UK premieres, including Anders Hillborg's *The Strand Settings*, starring soprano Renée Fleming.

bbc.co.uk/symphonyorchestra

Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra

Ever the orchestra covering a phenomenal geographical spread, the BSO presents 120 concerts in more than 40 towns and cities, with key residencies at Bournemouth, Bristol, Exeter, Poole and Portsmouth. Fresh from signing

a new rolling contract as Chief Conductor, Kirill Karabits gives 20 concerts, including a concert staging of Strauss's *Salome*. Violinist Augustin Hadelich is the new BSO Artist-in-Residence, playing seven concerts including concertos by Tchaikovsky and Sibelius.

bsolive.com

Britten Sinfonia

Baroque, jazz and modernist masters will be celebrated in concerts at the Barbican and Wigmore Hall in London, and at venues in Cambridge and Norwich. Highlights include pianist Benjamin Grosvenor directing Mozart, tenor Ian Bostridge in Netia Jones's new staging of Hans Zender's *Winterreise*, plus the 'At Lunch' chamber series turns 10, with new commissions from Daniël Bijnasson and Anna Clyne, among others.

brittensinfonia.com

City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra

Shakespeare's 400th anniversary is celebrated this season with a huge selection of 'Our Shakespeare' concerts, a highlight of which is Principal Guest Conductor Edward Gardner conducting a full concert performance of Verdi's *Falstaff*. Other highlights include pianist Rudolf Buchbinder in a cycle of Beethoven's piano concertos. There will also be three UK premieres, one of which is a CBSO co-commission – *Concerto for the Left Hand* by Hans Abrahamsen, performed by pianist Alexandre Tharaud.

cbso.co.uk

City of London Sinfonia

'RE:Imagine 2015-2016' is this season's title, with new perspectives on the grand salons of Venice, Paris and Vienna and the English parlour provided by artists including CLS Patron Dame Felicity Lott and Gwilym Bowen, performing works by Mahler, Strauss, Pergolesi and Butterworth. Audiences can tailor their musical experience at each concert through a variety of bespoke immersive events. Also there's 'Bach RE:Imagined', which presents a collection of newly commissioned Bach interpretations from composers including Charlotte Bray.

cityoflondonsinfonia.co.uk

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Mozart: Not just a pretty face

Why Lars Vogt and Royal Northern Sinfonia are on a mission to save Mozart's image from the chocolatiers



Lars Vogt in rehearsal with Royal Northern Sinfonia at Sage Gateshead

There's no denying the appeal of those lovely Mozart chocolates that flood the shops in Salzburg and elsewhere, with the clean-cut genius composer gazing impassively upwards at you, promising a sumptuous chocolate treat to go, no doubt, with his equally lovely *Eine kleine Nachtmusik* wafting gently from your speakers while you munch away. Except this is emphatically not what Lars Vogt, Royal Northern Sinfonia's new music director, thinks Mozart is all about.

A big Mozart project was at the top of his list for the orchestra (and in his guise as a famous Mozart pianist, that's surely little surprise). But he quickly coined the phrase 'chocolate box Mozart' to describe the way so many people misconceive the character of the music, and thus the man.

So this season, Royal Northern Sinfonia under Vogt's leadership sets out to shatter this image of Mozart as pretty and little more. They will be looking to find the complexities, the darkness and the intensity in his music. With more still to be announced (including some surprises!) there will be benchmark performances of works such as the Mass in C Minor, the Great G Minor Symphony, the Requiem, the Quintet for Piano and Wind and of course the demonically powerful Piano Concerto No.20 – the work with which Vogt opened this year's BBC Proms.

"The more you listen to him, the more you realise we've got Mozart wrong," says Vogt

pointing out that some of Mozart's works even showed the way towards early, brooding Romanticism. And Royal Northern Sinfonia – described by the Guardian as "one of the most daringly responsive Mozart orchestras in the country" – are primed to approach each one of these works as if it had been newly written, a terrain yet to be explored. As well as Vogt, artists in the "Reclaiming Mozart" series include Principal Guest Conductor Julian Rachlin, Robert Levin, Clemens Schuldt and Alexandre Bloch.

From this September, Royal Northern Sinfonia will be on a journey to change the way we see Mozart. Join them.



Mozart highlights with Royal Northern Sinfonia

Fri 18 Sep | 7.30pm | Sage One

Lars Vogt conductor
MOZART Symphony No.25

Sun 11 Oct | 3pm | Sage One

Bradley Creswick director
MOZART Symphony No.1;
Thamos, King of Egypt;
Concertone

Fri 30 Oct | 7.30pm | Sage One

Lars Vogt conductor / piano
MOZART Piano Concerto
No.20

Sun 6 Dec | 7.30pm | Sage One

Bradley Creswick director
MOZART Symphony No.41
'Jupiter'

Fri 5 Feb | 7.30pm | Sage One

Clemens Schuldt conductor
MOZART Mass in C Minor

Thu 3 Mar | 7.30pm | Sage One

Alexandre Bloch conductor & Francesco Piemontesi piano
MOZART Symphony No.31
'Paris' & Piano Concerto No.25

Sun 24 Apr | 3pm | Sage One

Kyra Humphreys director
MOZART Symphony No.33 &
Horn Concerto No.4

Fri 29 Apr | 7.30pm | Sage One

Lars Vogt conductor
MOZART Symphony No.38
'Prague'

Fri 20 May | 7.30pm | Sage One

Julian Rachlin conductor/ violin/viola
MOZART Symphony No.40

Fri 10 Jun | 7.30pm | Sage One

Lars Vogt conductor
MOZART Requiem

For more information, visit sagegateshead.com

Classical Opera

Soprano Sophie Bevan stars in the Cadogan Hall season opener, which also features Haydn's rarely performed overture to Salomon's opera *Windsor Castle*. A December *Messiah* performance at London's Middle Temple Hall features soloists Louise Alder, Helen Sherman, Benjamin Hulett and Darren Jeffery. The season closes with the Prague version of *Don Giovanni* at Cadogan Hall, with a cast headed up by Jacques Imbrailo.

classicalopera.co.uk

The English Concert

Handel arias sung by countertenor Iestyn Davies open the ensemble's season in a Wigmore Hall concert that also marks the venue's season beginning. Among four other Wigmore Hall concerts over the course of the year, and the October release of its latest recording for Harmonia Mundi USA, the ensemble also makes its debut at the Sam Wanamaker Playhouse, performing music by Biber, Purcell and others.

englishconcert.co.uk

English National Opera

Mark Wigglesworth's first season as Music Director kicks off with him conducting a new production of *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*, directed by Dmitri Tcherniakov. Among the English-language opera house's six other new productions are Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde*, designed by Anish Kapoor and directed by David Kramer, and Puccini's *La bohème*, directed by Benedict Andrews and starring Corinne Winters as Mimi. Conductors this season include Xian Zhang, Stephen Lord, Karen Kamensek and Edward Gardner.

eno.org

English Touring Opera

The company tours England with three French operas this autumn: Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande*, Massenet's *Werther*, and Offenbach's *The Tales of Hoffmann*. The English Touring Opera spin is to present these grand operas in more intimate incarnations: chamber orchestra arrangements for *Pelléas* and *Hoffmann* (the former arrangement an English premiere); and for the *Werther*, a new scoring by

gramophone.co.uk



Opera North: Rossini's *Barber of Seville* gets a revival in Leeds and on tour, with Eric Roberts reprising the role of Doctor Bartolo

Iain Farrington for a salon ensemble who will perform on stage with the singers.

englishtouringopera.org.uk

Hallé

'Fate' is the theme in Manchester this season, with pianist Sunwook Kim the opening-night soloist for Rachmaninov's Third Piano Concerto, conducted by Sir Mark Elder. Another highlight will be young Malaysian conductor Harish Shankar conducting Tchaikovsky's rarely heard *Fatum*. Ryan Wigglesworth will begin his debut season as Principal Guest Conductor by giving the UK premiere of Mark-Anthony Turnage's Piano Concerto. The season ends with a Dvořák festival.

halle.co.uk

London Philharmonic Orchestra

Principal Conductor Vladimir Jurowski continues his Mahler and Bruckner symphony cycles. Andrés Orozco-Estrada marks his first season as Principal Guest Conductor by conducting two concerts. Previous Principal Guest Conductor Yannick Nézet-Séguin also leads two concerts. The Southbank Centre-based orchestra will also be joining other London cultural institutions in marking

Shakespeare's 400th anniversary, with seven Shakespeare-themed concerts and numerous supporting talks and free events.

lpo.org.uk

London Sinfonietta

With the Queen Elizabeth Hall being renovated, the ensemble is venturing out across south London as part of its Southbank Centre Residency to venues such as Southwark Playhouse, the Coronet Theatre and St John's, Smith Square, while continuing its longstanding relationship with Kings Place. Conductors Susanna Mälkki and Ilan Volkov visit, and new commissions come from composers as diverse as Sir Harrison Birtwistle and Laurence Crane.

londonsinfonietta.org.uk

London Symphony Orchestra

The undoubted highlight for the Barbican-based orchestra has to be Sir Simon Rattle joining forces with director Peter Sellars for a new production of Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande*, the first time the pair have returned to the opera since their critically acclaimed 1993 production. Stravinsky and Bartók top the bill in Gergiev's season, exploring pivotal dramatic works such as *The Firebird* and *The Miraculous Mandarin*.

lso.co.uk

Manchester Camerata

In 2014-15 Manchester Camerata's ambition 'to redefine what an orchestra can do' saw a 54 per cent rise in new audiences and its dementia work shortlisted for a Royal Philharmonic Society Award. This year, against the backdrop of its expanding dementia research, the group's season opener stars guitarist Miloš Karadaglić, who performs Rodrigo's *Concierto de Aranjuez*; and trumpet virtuoso Tine Thing Helseth curates the experimental 'UpClose' series, which takes place in unexpected venues around Manchester.

manchestercamerata.co.uk

The Nash Ensemble

Wigmore Hall's Chamber Ensemble-in-Residence presents a season of concerts themed around Mozart, Mendelssohn and the Italians, joined by artists including mezzos Renata Pokupić and Christine Rice, and tenor John-Mark Ainsley. It also devotes an evening to Wigmore Composer-in-Residence Julian Anderson, which Anderson introduces himself in a pre-concert talk.

nashensemble.org.uk

Opera North

Cole Porter's *Kiss Me, Kate* opens the season, while core operatic



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repertoire, returning both to Leeds and on tour, includes Janáček's *Jenůfa*. Another highlight will be *Pleasure*, a new chamber opera by Mark Simpson and directed by Tim Albery, with a cast including Lesley Garrett. Equally noteworthy is a new production of Stephen Sondheim's *Into the Woods*, and a revival of the much-loved *Barber of Seville*.
operanorth.co.uk

Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment

With the South Bank's QEH undergoing refurbishment, the OAE is often found enjoying the Baroque venue of St John's, Smith Square in this, its 30th birthday, year. Indeed, St John's is the setting for the season opener, a programme of Telemann and Handel featuring tenor Ian Bostridge. Another season highlight, this time back at the Royal Festival Hall, will be Schumann's *Rhenish* Symphony, conducted by Marin Alsop for the 'Altered Minds' weekend.
oae.co.uk

Philharmonia Orchestra

The Southbank Centre-based Philharmonia celebrates its 70th anniversary season with 'Myths and Rituals', a headline festival celebrating the musical life and legacy of Stravinsky. The season opens, though, with a gala concert in which Christoph von Dohnányi conducts Beethoven's *Choral* Symphony. Other highlights are Esa-Pekka Salonen and Lang Lang joining forces for three concerts featuring the piano concertos of Grieg, Bartók and Prokofiev.
philharmonia.co.uk

Royal Liverpool Philharmonic

Still celebrating its 175th anniversary, the orchestra — in its 10th season under the baton of Chief Conductor Vasily Petrenko — kicks off with a brand new piece, *A Celebration Overture*, composed by Nigel Hess of *Ladies in Lavender* fame, together with Rachmaninov's Second Piano Concerto with soloist Ji Liu. Artists-in-Residence include violinist Julian Rachlin and singer and conductor Nathalie Stutzmann. Guest artists include Sir Andrew Davis and Tai Murray.
liverpoolphil.com



Rafael Payare and the Ulster Orchestra continue exploring Beethoven and Tchaikovsky

Royal Northern Sinfonia

New Music Director Lars Vogt and Principal Guest Conductor Julian Rachlin join to present three musical journeys: 'Reclaiming Mozart', 'Sibelius and the Musical North', and 'Early Encounters'. Highlights include Sibelius's Violin Concerto with Christian Tetzlaff, and Dvořák's Cello Concerto with his sister Tanja Tetzlaff. The New Year sees Vogt present his personal pick of up-and-coming virtuosos in a Young Artists Festival.
sagegateshead.com/about-us/northern-sinfonia

Royal Opera House

The new season opens with a bang as Sir John Eliot Gardiner conducts a new production of Gluck's *Orphée et Euridice*, with a cast including Juan Diego Flórez, plus dancers from Hofesh Shechter Company; Shechter himself both directs and choreographs. Music Director Sir Antonio Pappano conducts two new productions, including Mussorgsky's *Boris Godunov*. Other highlights include the world premiere of Haas's *Morgen und Abend*.
roh.org.uk

Royal Scottish National Orchestra

As the orchestra moves into the RSNO Centre, its new, purpose-built facility, so begins a season in which the programming is connected to community integration, collaboration and learning as never before. It also marks the start of the orchestra's two-year 125th anniversary celebrations. Music Director Peter Oundjian bookends the season with Mahler's Second Symphony and Beethoven's Ninth.
rsno.org.uk

Saffron Hall

Now in its second season, Saffron Hall is establishing itself as a world-class cultural centre for the Saffron Walden area. Debut artists this season include trumpeter Alison Balsom, violinist Joshua Bell, cellist Steven Isserlis and pianist Sir András Schiff, and returning artists include violinist Nicola Benedetti. Among the debut ensembles this year are the CBSO and the Oslo Philharmonic, and Bach Collegium Japan is one of the featured early music groups.
saffronhall.com

St John's, Smith Square

As renovations begin at London's Southbank Centre, the UK's only Baroque concert hall welcomes residencies from the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment and London Sinfonietta, along with performers from the International Piano Series and International Chamber Music Series, plus a mid-summer performance from the Philharmonia Orchestra. Other must-sees include Christmas and Easter visits from Polyphony with Stephen Layton, and period performances from the Brook Street Band and Gabrieli Consort and Players.
sjs.org.uk

Scottish Chamber Orchestra

The music of Brahms is at the heart of this year's season, with Principal Conductor Robin Ticciati conducting all four symphonies and *Ein deutsches Requiem*. Emmanuel Krivine takes up the post of Principal Guest Conductor, and his highlights include Karen Cargill singing Wagner's *Wesendonck-Lieder*

and the season closer, Beethoven's *Eroica* Symphony. There are also world premieres of SCO commissions by Lotta Wennäkoski and Hafliði Hallgrímsson.
sco.org.uk

Scottish Opera

Bizet's *Carmen* with Justina Gringyte in the title-role opens a 10-show season that includes two world premieres and six new productions — with a total of 111 performances taking place across 41 towns. Look out especially for the world premiere of *The Devil Inside*, a collaboration between novelist Louise Welsh and composer Stuart MacRae, inspired by Robert Louis Stevenson's short story *The Bottle Imp*.
scottishopera.org.uk

The Sixteen

This is The Sixteen's first season as Artistic Associate at Kings Place, along with an artist residency at Wigmore Hall, where it will perform three Monteverdi concerts. A collaboration with Streetwise Opera sees the group performing a new version of Bach's *St Matthew Passion* in Manchester's Campfield Market, and this year's Choral Pilgrimage, spanning the UK, focuses on William Byrd and Arvo Pärt.
thesixteen.com

Ulster Orchestra

Chief Conductor Rafael Payare continues his exploration of the music of Beethoven and Tchaikovsky, and Principal Guest Conductor Jac van Steen leads an opening night whose programme includes Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition*. Another highlight is pianist Jonathan Biss performing the European premiere of a new work for piano and orchestra by US composer Timo Andres.
ulsterorchestra.com

Welsh National Opera

Madness is the theme for this autumn's season, which launches the company's 70th birthday celebrations. A new production of Bellini's *I puritani*, conducted by Carlo Rizzi, opens proceedings. This is one of seven new productions over the course of the year, two of which will be world premieres — including Iain Bell's *In Parenthesis*.
wno.org.uk

Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia, Rome

The season opener at the Auditorium Parco della Musica marks the start of a Beethoven cycle, with Beethoven's Ninth featuring soloists Rachel Willis-Sørensen, Adriana di Paola, Stuart Skelton and Michael Volle, paired with the world premiere of Luca Francesconi's new choral work, *Bread, Water and Salt*, inspired by Nelson Mandela. The orchestra has also commissioned three new works from other Italian composers this season.

www.santacecilia.it/en

Bavarian RSO

The season kicks off with a programme featuring the choir which includes Vivaldi's *Dixit Dominus* and *Gloria*, directed by Giovanni Antonini. Sir Simon Rattle visits later in the season, conducting Haydn's *The Seasons* with soloists Marlis Petersen, John Mark Ainsley and Florian Boesch. Other visiting conductors include Esa-Pekka Salonen, Yannick Nézet-Séguin and Daniel Harding.

br-so.de

Bavarian State Opera

General Music Director Kirill Petrenko opens with a new production of Berg's *Lulu*, followed by a revival of Strauss's *Ariadne auf Naxos*. He also conducts the world premiere of *South Pole*, a new commission by Miroslav Srnka and Tom Holloway starring Rolando Villazón and Thomas Hampson. The season has eight new productions in total.

bayerische.staatsoper.de

Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra

The orchestra celebrates its 250th anniversary, opening with out-going Music Director Andrew Litton conducting the Norwegian premiere of Alissa Firsova's *Bergen's Bonfire*. Incoming Edward Gardner closes 2015 with Schoenberg's *Gurrelieder*, streamed on the Digital Concert Hall. A series devoted to Brahms's complete symphonies and music by Schumann includes Leif Ove Andsnes playing the latter's Piano Concerto.

harmonien.no

Berlin Philharmonic

A complete Beethoven symphony cycle conducted by Sir Simon Rattle



Next Berlin Phil chief Kirill Petrenko appears in Vienna and at the Bavarian State Opera

is the focus here. Another season-long theme is French music from Lully to Boulez. Conductors making their debut with the orchestra are François-Xavier Roth, Juanjo Mena and Matthias Pintscher. Meanwhile, Artist-in-Residence Peter Sellars directs three new productions.

berliner-philharmoniker.de

Czech Philharmonic

The orchestra celebrates its 120th year with new Permanent Guest Conductor Jakub Hrůša. Topping the year's offerings will be Chief Conductor and Artistic Director Jiří Bělohlávek with a concert performance of Janáček's *Jenůfa*, with Karita Mattila as Kostelníčka. The Artist-in-Residence is mezzo-soprano Magdalena Kožená.

ceskafilharmonie.cz

Deutsche Oper Berlin

The new season launches with new productions of Meyerbeer's *Vasco da Gama* (directed by Enrique Mazzola, and starring Roberto Alagna) and Verdi's *Aida*, and closes with Mozart's *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*, all of which share the theme of clashing cultures and the ways in which society grapples with 'the foreign'.

deutscheoperberlin.de/en

Gewandhaus Orchestra, Leipzig

Topping the bill is a Mozart/Strauss cycle under Chief Conductor Riccardo Chailly which also tours London, Vienna, Paris and Birmingham. Sibelius's 150th is marked by Alan Gilbert conducting Symphony No 7 alongside Schumann's Piano Concerto with Leif Ove Andsnes.

gewandhausorchester.de

Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra

The season opens under conductor David Afkham, in a concert featuring Ingvar Lidholm's *Kontakion*. Hot on the heels of this comes Antonello Manacorda conducting soprano Lisa Larsson in Martinsson's *Ich denke dein*. Other conductors include François-Xavier Roth, Anna-Maria Helsing and Kent Nagano. Soloists include pianist Alexander Gavrylyuk and cellist Truls Mørk.

gso.se/en

Luxembourg PO

New Principal Conductor Gustavo Gimeno steps up to replace Emmanuel Krivine. As a result, 'new departures' is a theme, illustrated with performances of five first symphonies. Andris Nelsons, Magdalena Kožená, Jean-François Zygel and the Simón Bolívar Symphony Orchestra of Venezuela all feature as Artists-in-Residence.

opl.lu

Mariinsky Theatre, St Petersburg

A new production of Tchaikovsky's *Queen of Spades*, conducted by Valery Gergiev in Mariinsky II, opens the season. In the first week there'll be five concerts showcasing winners of the XV International Tchaikovsky Competition. Other highlights include a new production of Tchaikovsky's *Oprichnik* and the world premiere of Rodion Shchedrin's *Christmas Tales*.

marlinsky.ru

Munich Philharmonic

Incoming Principal Conductor Valery Gergiev opens the season, conducting three performances of Mahler's *Resurrection* Symphony

with soprano Anne Schwanewilms and mezzo-soprano Olga Borodina. He also conducts Brahms's Violin Concerto with Janine Jansen. Visiting conductors include Paavo Järvi and Gianandrea Noseda.

mphl.de

Oslo Philharmonic

Chief Conductor Vasily Petrenko conducts several highlights, including Messiaen's *Turangalila-symphonie* and the full ballet score of Prokofiev's *Romeo and Juliet*, featuring sand artist Marina Sosnina. Jukka-Pekka Saraste conducts a Sibelius festival, and the UK tour in March includes the fifth symphonies of Shostakovich and Mahler.

oslofilharmonien.no

Paris National Opera

A Berlioz cycle begins with a new Alvis Hermanis production of *La damnation de Faust* at the Opéra Bastille, conducted by Philippe Jordan and starring Jonas Kaufmann, Sophie Koch and Bryn Terfel. There's also a Schoenberg cycle, featuring Romeo Castellucci's new *Moses und Aron*. The ballet company stages Anne Teresa de Keersmaeker's *Verklärte Nacht*, along with George Balanchine's *Brahms-Schönberg Quartet*.

operadeparis.fr/en

Orchestre de Paris

Paavo Järvi begins his last season as Music Director by conducting Sibelius's Fifth Symphony in the first concert, quickly followed by a weekend celebrating Arvo Pärt's 80th birthday. In January, Music Director Designate Daniel Harding conducts Berg's Violin Concerto with Isabelle Faust, along with Mahler's Fourth Symphony. Another highlight is Daniel Barenboim as soloist in Brahms's First Piano Concerto, directed by Zubin Mehta.

orchestredeparis.com

Rotterdam Philharmonic

A highlight of this season will be the orchestra's Chief Conductor Yannick Nézet-Séguin conducting Bruckner's Eighth Symphony alongside the world premiere of a flute concerto, *Love Songs*, by Bruno Mantovani with soloist Juliette Hurel. A new series of Sunday morning concerts,

including an optional educational programme for children, starts with Vivaldi's *The Four Seasons*.

rotterdamphilharmonisch.nl

Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, Amsterdam

Chief Conductor Designate Daniele Gatti leads two concert programmes, and Conductor Emeritus Mariss Jansons conducts a production of Tchaikovsky's *The Queen of Spades* at the Dutch National Opera. Later in the season, Daniel Harding and Iván Fischer each conduct two concerts juxtaposing works by Brahms and Bach. Pianist Jean-Yves Thibaudet becomes the second Artist-in-Residence.

concertgebouwworkest.nl

RTÉ National SO, Dublin

Thirty-four orchestral performances, supported by complementary talks and recitals, make up the orchestra's season. Highlights include a Mahler series presenting the four symphonies and two orchestral song-cycles inspired by the *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* poems.

Conductors include Alan Burbayev in his final season as Principal Conductor, and Nathalie Stutzmann.

rte.ie/nso

St Petersburg Philharmonic

Chief Conductor and Artistic Director Yuri Temirkanov conducts the opening concert featuring Shostakovich's Ninth Symphony and Brahms's Second Piano Concerto, with Garrick Ohlsson at the keyboard. In April, Charles Dutoit conducts Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique* and Tchaikovsky's First Piano Concerto with Miroslav Kultyshev. Kent Nagano visits in June to conduct Beethoven's Seventh.

philharmonia.spb.ru/en

Semperoper & Staatskapelle, Dresden

Highlights include the European premiere of John Harbison's *The Great Gatsby* directed by Keith Warner, and, in collaboration with the Salzburg Easter Festival, a double-bill of Mascagni's *Cavalleria rusticana* and Leoncavallo's *Pagliacci*. Meanwhile, Principal Conductor Christian Thielemann is at the Staatskapelle mixing traditional and contemporary repertoire. The new Composer-in-Residence is György

Kurtág, and the new Artist-in-Residence is pianist Yefim Bronfman.

semperoper.de; staatskapelle-dresden.de

Suisse Romande Orchestra

With no Music Director (Jonathan Nott arrives next season), the OSR is doing things differently and in style, inviting an exciting array of rising young conducting talent including Jakub Hrůša and Jamie Phillips. A highlight will be Principal Guest Conductor Kazuki Yamada, who dedicates four concerts to the works of Schnittke, Tchaikovsky, Glazunov and Shostakovich.

osr.ch

Teatro alla Scala, Milan

Principal Conductor Riccardo Chailly inaugurates the season by presenting a critical edition of the score of Verdi's *Giovanna d'Arco* (composed for La Scala in 1845), starring Anna Netrebko, Francesco Meli and Carlos Álvarez, and staged by Moshe Leiser and Patrice Caurier. In fact, Italian repertoire is at the heart of this season, which comprises 15 operas and six ballets, along with the symphonic season. Another highlight will be Puccini's *La fanciulla del West*, using Puccini's original orchestration rather than Toscanini's amendments.

teatroallascala.org/en

Teatro Real, Madrid

Perhaps the most exciting event this season is a new Teatro Real production, co-produced with the Opéra National de Paris, of Schoenberg's *Moses und Aaron*, directed by Romeo Castellucci. This is the first time the opera has been staged in Madrid. Lothar Keunigs conducts a cast headed by Albert Dohmen and John Graham-Hall.

teatro-real.com

Vienna Philharmonic

Two artistic debuts headline this season. First, that of Kirill Petrenko, who will conduct Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde* among other works, with Elisabeth Kulman and Johan Botha the soloists. Then Andrés Orozco-Estrada will conduct Vieuxtemps's Fourth Violin Concerto with Hilary Hahn. Other notable events are the premieres of Iván Erőd's Concerto for Three Clarinets and Thomas Larcher's Concerto for Orchestra.

wienerphilharmoniker.at



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NORTH AMERICA

American Symphony Orchestra

The season opens at Carnegie Hall with Music Director Leon Botstein conducting 'Mimesis: Musical Representations', a programme themed around music imitating other art forms which includes Schuller's *Seven Studies on Themes of Paul Klee* and Richard Strauss's *Also sprach Zarathustra*. Another highlight is a concert devoted to Russia's Jewish composers featuring two US premieres: Mikhail Gensin's *From Shelley* and Maximilian Steinberg's First Symphony.

americansymphony.org

Baltimore Symphony Orchestra

The Maryland orchestra under the artistic directorship of Marin Alsop celebrates its centenary, and one of its not-to-be-missed events is the 100th Anniversary Concert itself, featuring violinist Joshua Bell. Another concerto highlight will be Yo-Yo Ma performing Dvořák's Cello Concerto. Visiting conductors include John Adams and Juanjo Mena.

bsomusic.org

Boston Symphony Orchestra

Music Director Andris Nelsons opens with an all-Russian concert including Tchaikovsky's Piano Concerto No 1 played by Evgeny Kissin. Three weeks of concerts to mark 400 years since Shakespeare's death include new works by Hans Abrahamsen and George Tsontakis. Opera comes in the form of Christine Goerke singing the title-role in a concert performance of Strauss's *Elektra*.

bso.org

Chicago Symphony Orchestra

The orchestra honours its history in its 125th season. Most programmes feature at least one work that was given its world or US premiere by the orchestra. The opener will be a free concert for Chicago, conducted by Music Director Riccardo Muti at Millennium Park. Then Shakespeare's 400th anniversary will be marked by three concert performances of Verdi's *Falstaff*.

cso.org

Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra

Louis Langrée opens his third season as Music Director with Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique*.



Leonidas Kavakos joins in with the Sibelius celebrations at San Francisco Symphony

Then the season-long 'Concerto for Orchestra Project' opens with a world premiere by Sebastian Currier. The 'One City One Symphony' programme also boasts a world premiere, this time a trio of short works based on the poetry of Maya Angelou, by Jonathan Bailey Holland, Kristin Kuster and TJ Cole.

cincinnatisymphony.org

Cleveland Orchestra

Severance Hall highlights include Music Director Franz Welser-Möst conducting Bruckner's Sixth Symphony, and an all-Bartók programme of *The Miraculous Mandarin* and *Bluebeard's Castle*. Pianist Mitsuko Uchida returns to perform and conduct an all-Mozart programme being recorded as part of her ongoing collaboration with the orchestra. New music features strongly too, including the world premiere of Bernard Rands's *English Horn Concerto*.

clevelandorchestra.com

Dallas Symphony

Jaap van Zweden's eighth season as Music Director sees him conducting Bruckner's Fifth Symphony among other works. Three world premieres include a Dallas Symphony-commissioned orchestral work by Artist-in-Residence Conrad Tao, to be unveiled at the 2016 SOLUNA arts and music festival. Among the visiting artists are violinist Pinchas Zukerman and pianist Hélène Grimaud. A spring tour brings the orchestra to Europe once again.

mydso.com

Detroit Symphony Orchestra

Music Director Leonard Slatkin leads a Brahms festival featuring the complete symphonic repertoire, plus chamber music in the community. There's also the world premiere of Tod Machover's Symphony in D, written for Detroit, about Detroit, and using crowd-sourced sounds collected from citizens. Visiting artists include violinist Nigel Kennedy and pianist Jean-Yves Thibaudet.

dso.org

Los Angeles Opera

The company's 30th anniversary season presents six mainstage productions, plus two concerts at the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion. General Director Plácido Domingo will both sing and conduct in the season-opening double-bill of *Gianni Schicchi* and *Pagliacci*. Gustavo Dudamel makes his LA Opera debut, leading the final two performances of the mainstage season in *La bohème*.

laopera.org

Los Angeles Philharmonic

A season of Beethoven immersion sees Music and Artistic Director Gustavo Dudamel lead two complete sequential cycles of Beethoven's symphonies, shared between the LA Phil and the Simón Bolívar Symphony Orchestra of Venezuela. Among many other highlights is a collaboration with the American Ballet Theatre, celebrating its 75th anniversary, with Principal Dancer Roberto Bolle at the Walt Disney Concert Hall dancing Stravinsky's *Apollo*.

laphil.com

Lyric Opera of Chicago

The first season to be fully planned by General Director Anthony Freud and Music Director Sir Andrew Davis presents the world premiere of Jimmy López's *Bel canto*, conducted by Davis and starring Danielle de Niese as the American diva caught in a month-long hostage crisis. Davis also conducts Lehár's *The Merry Widow* starring Renée Fleming, plus his first *Wozzeck* in a new David McVicar production.

lyricopera.org

Metropolitan Opera, New York

There are 25 operas including six new productions. Bartlett Sher's new Verdi *Otello* is the season opener, conducted by Yannick Nézet-Séguin with Aleksandrs Antonenko in the title-role. Also worth looking out for are Jonas Kaufmann and Kristine Opolais in Richard Eyre's new production of *Manon Lescaut*. And Anna Netrebko makes her New York recital debut on the Met stage.

metopera.org

Minnesota Orchestra

A Beethoven festival sits at the core of this season, including a two-week marathon featuring all nine symphonies, led by Music Director Osmo Vänskä. In February, they're joined by Finland's YL Male Voice Choir and vocal soloists Lilli Paasikivi and Tommi Hakala to make a live-in-concert recording of Sibelius's *Kullervo*. Other guest artists this season are violinist Hilary Hahn and pianist Yevgeny Sudbin.

minnesotaorchestra.org

National Symphony Orchestra

The Washington orchestra's highlights include Music Director Christoph Eschenbach conducting the world premieres of two NSO commissions: Sean Shepherd's Violin Concerto with Leila Josefowicz, and Tobias Picker's *Concerto for Orchestra*. During a two-week residency, Nathalie Stutzmann makes her NSO conducting debut, and sings the contralto role in Mahler's *Rückert-Lieder*.

kennedy-center.org/nso

New York Philharmonic

The season gets off to a glittering start with Music Director Alan

Gilbert conducting an opening gala concert featuring Beethoven's Seventh Symphony and Grieg's Piano Concerto with Lang Lang. As Esa-Pekka Salonen begins his three-year Composer-in-Residence post, the orchestra performs three of his works, including world and New York premieres. He will also conduct during the Philharmonic's Messiaen Week. Bass-baritone Eric Owens becomes Artist-in-Residence. nyphil.org

Philadelphia Orchestra

The season's programming explores this orchestra's unique sound and the composers and artists inspired by it. Topping the list is Mahler's *Symphony of a Thousand*, whose US premiere the orchestra performed. Music Director Yannick Nézet-Séguin conducts four performances, the work's gargantuan forces realised by the Westminster Symphonic Choir, the Choral Arts Society of Washington, the American Boychoir and eight world-renowned vocal soloists. Also of note is the world premiere of a newly commissioned oratorio by the US composer Hannibal Lokumbe. philorch.org

Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra

Music Director Manfred Honeck conducts an Italian-themed opener this year, featuring Mendelssohn's *Italian* Symphony along with Daniil Trifonov's Piano Concerto, performed by Trifonov – one of four performer-composers this year, the others being Conrad Tao, Stewart Copeland and Cameron Carpenter. Pittsburgh debuts include violinist Augustin Hadelich and percussionist Martin Grubinger. pittsburghsymphony.org

St Louis Symphony Orchestra

Links between orchestral music and the written word are explored in 'Music Tells the Story'. Shakespeare's 400th anniversary is marked by performances including Prokofiev's and Berlioz's contrasting versions of *Romeo and Juliet*. The opening weekend, led by Music Director David Robertson, will feature violinist Joshua Bell in Lalo's *Symphonie espagnole*. Other visiting artists this season include soprano Karita Mattila and pianist Louis Lortie. stlsymphony.org

San Francisco Opera

Francesca Zambello's production of Verdi's *Luisa Miller* opens the season, starring Leah Crocetto, Michael Fabiano and Vitaliy Bilyy, and conducted by Music Director Nicola Luisotti. Other highlights include the American premiere of *The Fall of the House of Usher*, a double-bill presentation of Gordon Getty's *Usher House* and Robert Orledge's reconstruction of Claude Debussy's *La chute de la maison Usher* directed by David Pountney and conducted by Lawrence Foster. sfopera.com

San Francisco Symphony

A season-long Schumann symphony cycle led by Music Director Michael Tilson Thomas tops the bill at SFS. There's also a celebration of Sibelius's 150th anniversary, for which the guest artists include Susanna Malkki, Leif Ove Andsnes, Leonidas Kavakos and the New York Philharmonic. New music features strongly, too, including the world premiere of Mason Bates's *Auditorium*. sfsymphony.org

Seattle Symphony

Music Director Ludovic Morlot conducts an opening concert of Copland, Bernstein and Saint-Saëns to feature pianist Jean-Yves Thibaudet along with the winner, crowned the night before, of the French-American-themed Seattle Symphony Piano Competition. Other notable visiting artists this season include violinist Renaud Capuçon, pianist Lang Lang and conductor Thomas Dausgaard. One notable event under the 'Sonic Evolution' strand is the world premiere of Wayne Horvitz's *Those Who Remain*. seattlesymphony.org

Washington National Opera

The centerpiece of this 60th anniversary season is the company's first complete staging of Wagner's *Ring* cycle, directed by the company's Artistic Director, Francesca Zambello, and conducted by WNO Music Director Philippe Auguin. Look out, too, for the world premiere of a newly revised version of Philip Glass's *Appomattox*. kennedy-center.org/wno



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Our panel of expert critics have voted on the many hundreds of recordings we considered for this year's Awards, and we can now reveal the top three in each category. On August 27 at gramophone.co.uk we'll announce the winners in each category, then on September 17 we'll reveal the Recording of the Year. But for now, enjoy exploring the very best from an impressively strong year of releases.

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- **Rameau** Pièces de clavecin
Mahan Esfahani hpd
- **Vivaldi** Twelve Concertos, 'L'estro armonico', Op 3
Brecon Baroque / Rachel Podger vn



Resonus (M) ②
RES10147 (6/15)



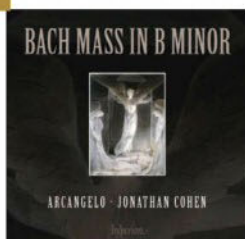
Hyperion (M) ②
CDA68071/2 (2/14)



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BAROQUE VOCAL

- **JS Bach** Mass in B minor
Soloists; Arcangelo / Jonathan Cohen
- **Charpentier** La descente d'Orphée aux enfers
Soloists; Boston Early Music Festival Vocal and Chamber Ensembles / Paul O'Dette, Stephen Stubbs
- **Monteverdi** Vesperi solenni per la festa di San Marco
Concerto Italiano / Rinaldo Alessandrini



Hyperion (F) ②
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CHAMBER

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Martin Fröst *cl* **Janine Jansen, Boris Brovtsyn** *vns*
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Roland Pöntinen *pf*
- **Haydn** String Quartets, Op 20
Doric String Quartet
- **Smetana** String Quartets Nos 1 & 2
Pavel Haas Quartet



BIS (F)
BIS2063 (7/14)



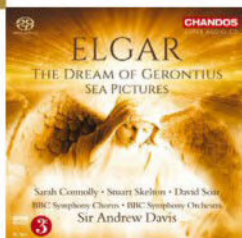
Chandos (B) (2)
CHAN10831 (12/14)



Supraphon (F)
SU4172-2 (5/15)

CHORAL

- **Elgar** The Dream of Gerontius. Sea Pictures
Sarah Connolly *mez* **Stuart Skelton** *ten*
David Soar *bass* **BBC SO and Chorus** / **Andrew Davis**
- **Haydn** Die Jahreszeiten
Soloists; Collegium Vocale Gent; Champs-Élysées Orchestra / **Philippe Herreweghe**
- **Howells** Stabat mater. Sine nomine. Te Deum
The Bach Choir; Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra / **David Hill**



Chandos (F) (2)
CHSA5140 (11/14)



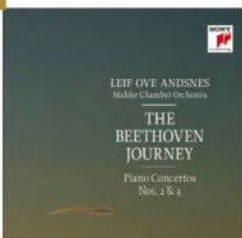
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CONCERTO

- **Beethoven** Piano Concertos Nos 2 & 4
Mahler Chamber Orchestra / **Leif Ove Andsnes** *pf*
- **Beethoven** Piano Concertos Nos 3 & 4
Maria João Pires *pf* **Swedish RSO** / **Daniel Harding**
- **Dvořák** Cello Concerto, etc
Alisa Weilerstein *vc* **Anna Polonsky** *pf*
Czech Philharmonic Orchestra / **Jiří Bělohlávek**



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- **Nørgård** Symphonies Nos 1 & 8
Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra / **Sakari Oramo**



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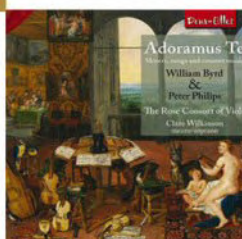
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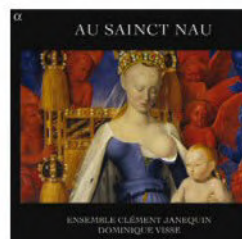
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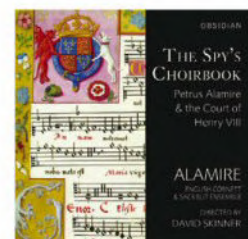
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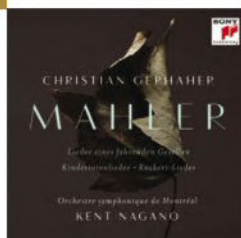
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GRAMOPHONE

RECORDING OF THE MONTH

A Russian in America for Rachmaninov's three sets of variations –
Jeremy Nicholas welcomes a recording that is up there with the very best



Rachmaninov • Trifonov

Rachmaninov Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini, Op 43^a. Variations on a Theme of Chopin, Op 22. Variations on a Theme of Corelli, Op 42
Trifonov Rachmaniana

Daniil Trifonov *pf*

^aPhiladelphia Orchestra / Yannick Nézet-Séguin
DG © 479 4970GH (79' • DDD)



'While Daniil Trifonov revels in Rachmaninov's pianistic gymnastics, he is also alert to the moments of mischief'

The opening bars tell you this is going to be a good 'Pag Rhap'. As things turn out, it is a great one, clearly up there with the very best. That includes the indispensable benchmark recording with the composer and the same orchestra made in 1934, just six weeks after they had given the premiere under Leopold Stokowski. Let's deal first with DG's sound: in the Rhapsody it is sumptuous, full-bodied and realistic, with a near-perfect balance between piano and orchestra. The Philadelphia's silky strings and characterful woodwind are a joy, while the percussion department is suitably punchy without being overcooked.

The tempo relationships between each variation strike me as ideal and the tricky moments of co-ordination (Var 9, for example) are delivered with spot-on rhythmic precision. Between the hijinks and dashing passagework there is time aplenty to relax: the cellos' entry in No 12, *Tempo di minueto*, is simply gorgeous, but even better is the heart-melting transition from the end of Var 17 into the famous Var 18, no stand-alone piece here but fully integrated into the musical narrative.

While Trifonov revels in the pianistic gymnastics, he is also alert to the moments of mischief, such as the dying phrase that precedes Var 24, arguably the most technically challenging of the variations – and with what exemplary clarity he

handles it. I should like to have heard a more gleeful *glissando* whooping up to the top of the keyboard to launch into the final page, but it hardly matters when being swept along to the work's tumultuous and inexorable conclusion – inexorable, that is, but for the cheeky two final bars, perfectly timed and graded by this partnership. Trifonov and Nézet-Séguin do seem genuinely to be a meeting of musical minds.

The remainder of the disc is given over to solo works, recorded in New York rather than in Philadelphia, but with the same opulent piano tone and natural acoustic. Rachmaninov's *Variations pour le piano sur un thème de F Chopin* (dedicated to Leschetizky) was his first 20th-century solo composition for his own instrument. The theme is the C minor Prelude, Op 28 No 20, presented by Rachmaninov in abbreviated form. You would not be alone in thinking that this wonderfully imaginative work tends to sprawl over its 22 variations. Rachmaninov himself thought so and intended to issue the work in a shortened version but never did. Trifonov offers his own solution by conflating Var 10 with the latter part of Var 12 and dropping Var 11 altogether. Those who insist on the complete score will demur but, personally, I think this is a beneficial (and seamless) cut – and rather clever. Furthermore, he cuts Vars 18 and 19 (no great loss in my opinion) and doesn't take the repeat in Var 22. Trifonov also provides his own alternative ending, cutting (as most do) the superfluous *presto* final page and inserting a reprise of the original theme, but with Chopin's dynamics inverted: thus Var 22's *pp* conclusion merges into the opening bars of the Prelude at *pp*,

building to an *ff* ending. For me, this is the most convincing realisation of Rachmaninov's Op 22 I have yet heard. At its heart is Var 16, surely one of the composer's greatest melodic inspirations, on a par with the *Paganini* Var 28 (and recorded as such many years ago in a lush piano-and-orchestra arrangement by Semprini). Avoiding the temptation of saccharine melancholy, Trifonov plays this, *sans rubato*, with exquisite tenderness.

If this variation can be seen as a forerunner of the homesick



Listening to the playback: Trifonov, Nézet-Séguin and the technical crew



Genuinely a meeting of musical minds: Pianist Daniil Trifonov and conductor Yannick Nézet-Séguin recording Rachmaninov with the Philadelphia Orchestra

Rachmaninov, it is the same emotion that inspired Trifonov's own eponymous suite of five short movements. 'I had been in the US for two or three months, I was 18 years old, away from my parents for the first time, so far from home,' he confesses in the booklet. Expressing his nostalgia for his roots, *Rachmaniana* is 'a kind of homage to Rachmaninov' who, like Trifonov, had made a home in the New World. While there are recognisable references to and figurations borrowed from various Preludes and *Études-tableaux* (not to mention the inevitable bells!), the writing rises above mere pastiche into a highly effective recital piece.

Finally, there are the *Variations on a Theme of Corelli* (without any textual interventions), a performance on a par with that of the *Chopin Variations*.

In a work that can become unduly sombre (Richard Farrell – Atoll, 1/11) or dry and detached (Nikolai Lugansky, glassy-toned, in the same programme minus, of course, *Rachmaniana* – Warner, 12/04), Trifonov shapes the 20 brief separate entries into a satisfying whole, revealing the richness and fertility of Rachmaninov's invention. While I still admire André Watts's assertive account from 1968 (Philips, 8/99 – listen to his fiery *Intermezzo*), the young Russian is a more beguiling, lyrical companion.

DG, not incidentally, helpfully gives each variation throughout the disc a separate track – an impressive 73 in all. Not, I think, that you'll want to do anything but listen all the way through to this early contender for the 2016 Awards. **G**

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Editor's Choice

Martin Cullingford's pick of the finest recordings reviewed in this issue

Orchestral



Andrew Achenbach on Zimerman's new Lutosławski Concerto disc:

'Zimerman is at his dazzlingly articulate best, locating even greater reserves of concentration than previously' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 44**



Alexandra Coghlan delves into a new album from Aurora Orchestra:

'Aurora are such persuasive performers, such believers in their musical cause, that it forces you to look and listen again' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 50**

Adams

Absolute Jest^a. Grand Pianola Music^b

^b**Orli Shaham, ^bMarc-André Hamelin pfs**

^b**Synergy Vocals; ^aSt Lawrence Quartet;**

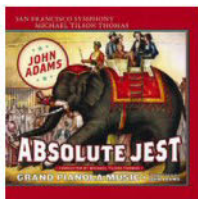
San Francisco Symphony Orchestra /

^a**Michael Tilson Thomas, ^bJohn Adams**

Recorded live at Davies Symphony Hall, San

Francisco, ^aMay 4, 5 & 9, 2013; ^bJanuary 16-18, 2015

SFS Media © SFS0063 (58' • DDD/DSD)



Three decades separate John Adams's *Absolute Jest* from his *Grand Pianola Music*, the

two works sharing a preoccupation with Beethoven's place in the modern world and with unusually constituted ensembles. The combination of string quartet with orchestra allows Adams access all areas to the instrumental materials Beethoven gravitated towards during his later period; *Absolute Jest*, he tells us, is a colossal 25-minute scherzo celebrating Beethoven's 'energy and feeling' – rebutting what he describes as the 'coldness' of modernism.

Grand Pianola Music, too, is an exuberant, larger-than-life freefall through musical history, the off-the-leash arpeggios typical of Beethoven's late piano sonatas bumping into Liszt then, controversially, ending up glittering like Liberace's candelabra. Adams's naughtiest piece has been well documented on record. His own 1994 recording with the London Sinfonietta played the notes; the Netherlands Wind Ensemble under Stephen Mosko ran more convincingly amok with its Rik Mayall two-finger salute-waving mischief. And so it's good to have this second view from Adams himself. Tempi are pretty consistent with his earlier recording, although the finale takes slightly longer over flooding our senses with arpeggios. Orli Shaham and Marc-André Hamelin play with brute, cartoon-like reverie, and the slightly brash, grainy recording helps nail Adams's central conceit: that this brass-heavy ensemble is slamming headfirst into the slow-paced minimalist opening. Sousa meets Glass.

Late-19th-century arpeggios shake hands with their long-lost 1970s relatives.

Beethoven, as he re-emerges in *Absolute Jest*, is less of a waggish caricature. The nervy rhythmic tick of the Ninth Symphony's *Scherzo*, forever looping and punctuating, frames the opening section. But Adams's reluctance to internalise this reference as raw compositional material reduces Beethoven to a soundbite – which ends up being photo-bombed by the Seventh Symphony. Mashed-up fugue themes from the *Grosse Fuge* and Op 131 lead to a finale that transforms the radiant opening chord progression of the *Waldstein* Sonata into a funk stampede.

The piece is an entertaining diversion and the San Francisco SO respond winningly to Adams's tailor-made if, at times, disappointingly generic orchestration. But Beethoven's rugged individualism ultimately resists this gentrified re-imagining; the younger, bolder Adams, who dealt equitably with the apparent embarrassment of polluting the rarefied world of process music, is missed. **Philip Clark**

Arnold • Elgar • Simpson

Arnold Sonata for Strings Elgar String Quartet, Op 83 (both arr D Matthews) Simpson String Quartet No 3 – Allegro deciso

Orchestra of St Paul's / Ben Palmer

Somm © SOMMCD0145 (66' • DDD)



In 2004 David Matthews made an arrangement for string orchestra of the wonderfully tender and fragrantly poetic *Piacevole* centrepiece from Elgar's Op 83 String Quartet. George Vass conducted the successful premiere at the Hampstead and Highgate Festival, after which he urged Matthews to rework the outer movements as well. Six years later, Vass's Presteigne Festival Orchestra was able to give the first performance of Matthews's sensitive and stylish treatment in its entirety. Even more compelling, I think, is the same composer's

2005 recasting, as a Sonata for Strings, of Malcolm Arnold's Second String Quartet from 1975. Dedicated to the Irish violinist Hugh Maguire (then leader of the Allegri Quartet), it dates from Arnold's turbulent Dublin years; its elements of gritty dialogue, skittish mood-swings (the second movement juxtaposes a deeply felt soliloquy for first violin with an Irish reel that soon turns nasty) and hard-won serenity seem to have acquired an even greater intensity in this new garb.

Robert Simpson's string-orchestra arrangement of the substantial finale from his own two-movement Third Quartet (1953-54) was prompted by the conductor Walter Goehr and strikes me as another success. Simpson thought of his first three string quartets as a trilogy, and this mighty *Allegro deciso* shows the composer at his early peak – music of tremendous eloquence, awesome rigour and kinetic force. Here, as elsewhere, Ben Palmer elicits an agreeably spruce and consistently alert response from the 16 string players of the Orchestra of St Paul's, while Ben Connellan's sound is pleasingly transparent and airy to match. All told, a stimulating and laudable release. **Andrew Achenbach**

Bartók

Violin Concerto No 2, Sz112^a.

Concerto for Orchestra, Sz116

^a**Tedi Papavrami vn Luxembourg Philharmonic Orchestra / Emmanuel Krivine**

Alpha © ALPHA205 (76' • DDD)



A great idea, this, coupling what are surely Bartók's two greatest non-theatre

large-scale orchestral works on a single CD, both of them winning examples of the composer working at white heat.

The first point worth making is that the recordings are very informative, being closely balanced, spatially vivid and with clearly defined violin desks to the left and right of the rostrum. Tedi Papavrami has a



Brahms in Berlin: Daniel Barenboim and Gustavo Dudamel with the city's Philharmonic Orchestra

richly yielding tone, an overtly expressive playing style and the ability to dart in and around Emmanuel Krivine's animated accompaniment. And although the sound is very up-front, the balance with Papavrami is excellent; at 2'37" into the first movement, for example, where there's so much pulsing activity worth hearing behind the solo line, not to mention the shifting string lines soon afterwards and the fierce brass blasts after those. Full *tutti* passages are very exciting (eg at 4'27") and the tempo is kept very much on the move – no dawdling except where Bartók cues a change of pace. The well-judged recording reports things very much as they are in the score (crystal-clear *pizzicatos* from around 6'59" into the second movement). The mirror-imaging finale is full of drama, the coda mysterious, just as it is in the finale of the Concerto for Orchestra, another compelling performance.

Here the various instances of quasi-fugal writing come off particularly well, specifically in the outer movements; the Intermezzo is very rudely 'interrupted' (the lifelike sound helps) and the 'Game of Pairs' is both relaxed and playful. Only in the 'Elegia' did I miss the very special Hungarian stresses that Boulez brings to

the viola line on his Chicago recording, even more so than Kocsis or Fischer in Budapest. Those would I suppose be my first digital choices overall: both are marginally more polished than this otherwise excellent Luxembourg Philharmonic Production, with Kelemen and Kocsis just about taking the lead in the Violin Concerto. But those who fancy a CD with these two masterpieces coupled together need not hold back. Both performances are compelling, and the sound keeps every detail worth hearing securely within earshot. **Rob Cowan**

Violin Concerto No 1 – selected comparison:

Kelemen, Hungarian Nat PO, Kocsis
(10/11) (HUNG) HSACD32509

Concerto for Orchestra – selected comparisons:

Chicago SO, Boulez (3/94) (DG) ➔ 437 826-2GH

Budapest Fest Orch, I Fischer (1/99⁸, 12/05)

(PHIL) ➔ 476 7255DH or 475 7684PB3

Hungarian Nat PO, Kocsis (HUNG) HSACD32187

Brahms

Piano Concertos – No 1, Op 15; No 2, Op 83

Daniel Barenboim *pf*

Staatskapelle Berlin / Gustavo Dudamel

DG (M) ② 479 4899GH2 (102 • DDD)

Recorded live at the Philharmonie, Berlin,
September 1-3, 2014



There is no musician before the public today with a more complete knowledge of the

Brahms piano concertos than Daniel Barenboim. He has been playing the works for more than 50 years and conducting them for more than 40, sometimes for those very same master Brahmsians – Arrau, Rubinstein – at whose feet he had earlier sat. When he first recorded the concertos with Sir John Barbirolli in 1967, the competition was stiff, not least from Arrau himself, whose recordings with Giulini and the Philharmonia had already made their own indelible mark. Those earliest Barenboim recordings (EMI, 3/68, 12/68) were warmly received in these columns, despite Trevor Harvey's concerns over 'small points' which 'would matter little in a concert performance but which do matter on record'. Such things still matter, though the entirely plausible belief that live recordings can never be of more than documentary interest has long since been kicked into touch.

This newest cycle was recorded at the 2014 Berlin Festival, where Barenboim

played both concertos in a single evening. If Trevor Harvey were still with us, there would be more than a handful of 'small points' to worry over. Yet Barenboim's larger mastery remains, underpinned by playing that, in the D minor First Concerto at least, is close to studio quality.

Barenboim's mastery strikes me as being of a different order to that of, say, Nelson Freire, whose hard-driven, live, Award-winning recordings with Chailly and the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra (Decca, 11/06) seem to say less at each new hearing. Like all great Brahms interpreters, Barenboim gives the music space. How otherwise is it possible to register the outer form and inner detail of the opening movement of the D minor Concerto, a minor-key epic in 6/4 time marked to be played *Moderato*?

If this performance is a must for Brahms collectors (the slow movement is especially memorable), that of the B flat Second Concerto is more problematic. The two inner movements are beautifully done: Barenboim's unusually reflective account of the *Scherzo* complementing well the lovely cello-led *Andante*. The first movement's lyric sections are also finely attended to. It's when Brahms has chords and trills crashing around us like falling masonry that Barenboim sometimes struggles to make headway. And at such moments DG's bright, accurate recording allows no hiding place. As to the concerto's finale, Barenboim has never been much inclined to point up its Mozartian grace or Hungarian colour. That said, the playing itself is good enough, until what is by any standards a decidedly rocky account of the *Un poco più presto* coda.

The orchestra is Barenboim's own Berlin Staatskapelle, which produces a Brahms sound of rare depth and beauty under the direction of Barenboim's chosen collaborator Gustavo Dudamel. Some of the quiet playing has to be heard to be believed. Dudamel's grasp of the music's symphonic dimension is also impressive, as is his fleetness of foot when a sudden insight or unscheduled adjustment from his distinguished soloist causes the sands suddenly to shift. **Richard Osborne**

Selected comparison:

Freire, Leipzig Gewandhaus Orch, Chailly
(9/06) (DECC) 475 7637DX2

Brahms

Brahms Piano Quartet No 1, Op 25 (orch Schoenberg) **Schoenberg Begleitungsmusik zu einer Lichtspielszene, Op 34**

Netherlands Philharmonic Orchestra /

Marc Albrecht

Pentatone Ⓢ PTC5186 398 (51' • DDD/DSD)



The same label, conductor and orchestra recently produced a discreet

and unmannered recording of Mahler's Fourth Symphony (6/15). Are those the qualities required by Schoenberg's Brahms? Marc Albrecht cultivates an orchestral blend plausibly akin to something Brahms might have done with the piece, whereas in Simon Rattle's recent recording Schoenberg is the dominant presence: the many doublings are carefully differentiated as if laid out in a handbook of orchestration.

Albrecht's tempi honour the scale of the original, the rhythms are nicely sprung and he uses the orchestration to mould the contrasting themes of each movement more than exaggerated shifts and transitions between them. He also does more than most to prevent the march at the centre of the *Andante* from sounding grotesquely inflated in Schoenberg's version – but resistance is useless. Every bar of the piece screams 1937, not 1861, and it is the very strangeness of both Schoenberg's idea and its execution that draws me towards the overblown *folie de grandeur* of Rattle's recording, so close to parody as makes no difference.

For all that Schoenberg took himself seriously and, more importantly, expected everyone around him to do the same, he had a nice line in self-deprecating humour which differentiated his ego from, say, that of Mahler, whom he had observed at close quarters. Mockery rather than ignorance of the Hollywood scene may have motivated the ridiculous demands he made when MGM asked for some film music: his attitude had always been that his music would come first, as it did in the suffocated expressionism of the *Begleitungsmusik* from 1930, where we must run a Fritz Lang-style reel through our own minds. Pentatone and Albrecht make the effort easier than the erstwhile EMI engineers for Rattle, bringing the piano forwards in the mix and saturating the colour of each musical event with impressively disciplined playing, if at the expense of imagined psychological depth and a long line through the work's development from threat to catastrophe. **Peter Quantrill**

Selected comparison – coupled as above:

BPO, Rattle (EMI/WARN) (10/11) 457815-2

Bruckner

Symphony No 9 (1896 version, ed Nowak), with

finale reconstructed by Nors S Josephson

Aarhus Symphony Orchestra / John Gibbons

Danacord Ⓢ DACOCD754 (81' • DDD)



The performing versions by William Carragan and Samale-Phillips-Cohrs-

Mazzuca of the incomplete fourth movement of Bruckner's Ninth Symphony may be the best known, but they are not the only attempts to bring the score to life. Few of the other versions, however, have made much headway in either concert or recording studio. An exception is the version completed in 1992 by the American composer and musicologist Nors S Josephson, which has had several performances in recent years and which features on this recording by the British conductor John Gibbons.

The brief booklet essay by Josephson provides little information about his method for reconstructing the finale other than that it was a 10-year-long project. Although much of the exposition was fully scored by Bruckner, the early stages of Josephson's completion are different in a number of ways from its rival performing versions, an example being the modest volume with which the chorale theme is introduced (at 5'03") compared to its *fff* entry elsewhere. These differences gradually become more apparent as the movement progresses. In particular, the missing parts of the development seem less worked out here, and the reappearance of the final section of the first movement in the finale's coda seems somewhat incongruous in this context.

Nevertheless, no performing version of the last movement can provide anything more than an approximation of the score that Bruckner might have produced had he lived. The Josephson completion provides a valuable new perspective on the finale alongside the most recent versions by Carragan (recorded by Gerd Schaller – Profil, 11/11) and Samale-Phillips-Cohrs-Mazzuca (recorded by Rattle – EMI/Warner, 8/12). Gibbons's interpretation of the score is eloquent and serves to illuminate the completion of the finale, although it lacks the last degree of intensity when compared to the finest recordings of the three-movement version of the symphony. The Danish orchestra play well and the recording is clear and well balanced even in the loudest climaxes.

Christian Hoskins

Glass

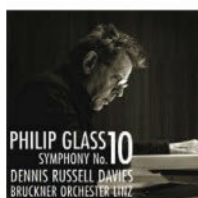
Symphony No 10. Concert Overture

Bruckner Orchestra, Linz / Dennis Russell Davies

Orange Mountain Music Ⓢ OMM0101 (41' • DDD)



Pianist Vadym Kholodenko and conductor Miguel Harth-Bedoya, who offer a thrilling new coupling of concertos by Grieg and Saint-Saëns on Harmonia Mundi



The background to Glass's Tenth Symphony is unusual. It was originally performed by the Philip Glass Ensemble to accompany the closing fireworks ceremony for the 2008 Expo Zaragoza, entitled *Los paisajes del Río*, but Glass decided to find a new home for material that would otherwise have been consigned to the dark recesses of his extensive back catalogue. Thus Symphony No 10 was born, receiving its premiere by the Orchestre Français des Jeunes (French Youth Orchestra) under Dennis Russell Davies in August 2012.

Of course, the notion of recycling music originally designed for a one-off event is not new. Glass makes a persuasive case in the booklet-notes: 'Composers re-use pieces not because they run out of ideas but because they have a good piece buried in another piece of music that no one is ever going to play. How can I get this piece so that people will be able to hear it? You have to put it in a new format.'

All well and good, especially if you buy into the idea that symphonies are the best medium for this recycling process, allowing

the composer more time and space to fully transform and develop ideas that were only partially realised in previous musical situations. There's a strong historical precedent here, too, of course. However, one has to ask the question: can more be lost than gained through this act of musical translation? Unsurprisingly, given the work's original function, Glass's symphony comprises five short movements that are ceremonial and dance-like in character. The work opens and ends effectively enough with a darkly exuberant first and flamboyant fifth. Deprived of their extra-musical clothing, some of the other movements lack variety and substance, however. The slow second's gradually unfolding two-note melody is only enlivened by pulsing patterns in percussion and brass, while the third's endless tonic-dominant oscillations and the fourth's paradiddle patterns struggle to hold interest. The Bruckner Orchester Linz hardly slip out of first gear and only really come to life during the turbo-charged ending to the dynamic *Concert Overture* (2012), which rounds off the disc.

Glass's music is often at its most effective in multimedia forms such as opera, film, dance or even – as in the case of *Los paisajes del Río* – grand ceremonial music. Sadly, the fizz, colour, crackle and sparkle of the

original performance is – for the most part – missing from this symphony. **Pwyl ap Siôn**

Grieg • Evju

Grieg Piano Concertos^a – Op 16 (ed Grainger); in B minor (fragments). With a Water Lily, Op 25 No 4. A Dream, Op 48 No 6 (both transcr Evju) Evju Piano Concerto (after Grieg)^a
Carl Petersson *pf* **Prague Radio Symphony Orchestra / Kerry Stratton**
 Grand Piano © GP689 (57' • DDD)

Grieg • Saint-Saëns

Grieg Piano Concerto, Op 16
Saint-Saëns Piano Concerto No 2, Op 22
Vadym Kholodenko *pf* **Norwegian Radio Orchestra / Miguel Harth-Bedoya**
 Harmonia Mundi © HMU90 7629 (54' • DDD)



Grieg's Piano Concerto in A minor was the first concerto ever to be recorded (Wilhelm Backhaus, heavily abridged). That was in 1909. Since then there have been, at a conservative estimate, over 120 further recordings. Yet despite this constant

hyperion

BACH HANDEL SCARLATTI
Gamba Sonatas

STEVEN ISSERLIS
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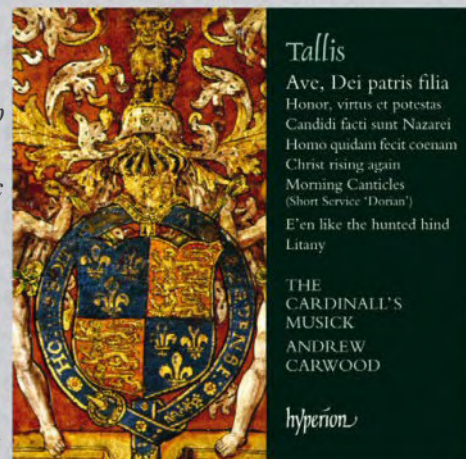


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average flow of one new version every year since Backhaus's, halfway through 2015 there have already been, to my certain knowledge, five new ones. How do you stake a claim to significance when the competition includes de Greef, Friedman, Lipatti, Kovacevich and Andsnes?

Carl Petersson makes a claim by offering the work in Percy Grainger's edition (1919). The audible alterations made to the score are absolutely minimal. What is audible – and what seems to have informed this reading – is Grainger's observation in his Foreword that Grieg's own tempi 'were faster than those usually heard in performances of [his] works by other artists' and his 'renderings knew no trace of sentimentality or mawkishness'. Petersson and his conductor take Grainger at his word and thereby rob the concerto of all its charm.

In 1882–83 Grieg worked on a second piano concerto in B minor but it was never completed. The 2'34" of these sketches precede a five-movements-in-one Piano Concerto in B minor by Helge Evju (b1942) based on fragments by Grieg. I rather enjoyed this 'piece of whimsy' (Evju) with its lush romanticism, neo-Lisztian flourishes and echoes of Rachmaninov. This, rather than the Grieg Concerto, makes the disc appealing, along with Evju's two Earl Wild-inspired Grieg song transcriptions, played with commanding virtuosity by Petersson.

For a truly outstanding recording of the Grieg, turn to Vadym Kholodenko, Miguel Harth-Bedoya and the Norwegian Radio Orchestra, with its notably eloquent horn, cello and flute soloists making their presence felt alongside a pianist who allows the big tunes to breathe, knows exactly how to shape each movement and yet injects the urgency of a live performance into proceedings. The slow movement is as moving as any I've heard, including the underrated version by Cziffra *père et fils*.

This is good but the companion piece, Saint-Saëns's Second Concerto, is even better, perhaps the most consistently accurately observed reading on disc. The opening and closing of the first movement are humorously ponderous – isn't that the point? – while the *Scherzo* is delivered with a mischievous *leggiere* insouciance. The *Presto*, like all three movements slightly slower than those of Hough, Grosvenor and Shelley, builds to a thrilling climax in which the soloist, for once, is not obliterated by the orchestra. Shelley added the Schumann Concerto to his Grieg and Saint-Saëns Second (Chandos, 5/09), but otherwise this Harmonia Mundi coupling is hard to beat. **Jeremy Nicholas**

Grieg • Moszkowski

Grieg Piano Concerto, Op 16^a

Moszkowski Piano Concerto, Op 59

Joseph Moog *pf* Deutsche Radio Philharmonie
Saarbrücken Kaiserslautern / Nicholas Milton
Onyx © ONYX4144 (66' • DDD)

^aRecorded live at the Grosser Sendesaal,
Saarbrücken, May 30, 2014



Whatever scintillates and delights is here in super-abundance. For brilliant pianist (and

later spin-master for Benjamin Netanyahu) David Bar-Illan, the Moszkowski Concerto is 'first and foremost an orgy of pianism, an intoxication of what the instrument can do, a celebration of sound, sparkle and speed. Its the kind of assault on the senses experienced at a fantastic firework display. Plus a little pulling at the heart-strings. Profound? No. Thrilling? Yes.'

This is admirably put, though neither Bar-Illan's recording nor any other (Piers Lane and Michael Ponti) come within distance of Joseph Moog's. From Moog everything sparks and thunders. A virtuoso to the manner born, notes stream from his fingers like cascading diamonds, his playing alive with what David Fanning so wittily called 'the boggle factor'. Hear him leap, released, like a greyhound straining in the slips, from the *Andante's* dreams into the *Scherzo vivace*, though with ample time in the former to relish the more serious side of Moszkowski's ebullient nature (for this, try the deeply expressive second étude from Op 24, memorably recorded by Seta Tanyel – Hyperion, 12/96, A/02). Again, hear him once more frolicking through vaudeville tunes in the finale. At 7'05", as the concerto approaches its grandiloquent close, you will witness a heart-stopping bravura of a sort rarely encountered.

After this, the evergreen Grieg Concerto comes as something of a makeweight. But Moog's engulfing command is complemented by poise and reflection (the first-movement cadenza and first entry in the central *Adagio*). His sprint to the finale's finish could hardly be more joyous or exhilarating. This is entirely a young pianist's view, though in truth Lipatti was only two years older than 28-year-old Moog when he made his famously regal recording. Moog's performance is greeted with a storm of cheers, wolf-whistles and all. Clearly he is already among the most brilliant of pianists; and in the Moszkowski his orchestra and conductor let their hair down and relish every bar of this delectable *fin-de-siècle* virtuoso fling. **Bryce Morrison**

KA Hartmann • Shostakovich • Weinberg

KA Hartmann Concerto funebre^a

Shostakovich Unfinished Violin Sonata^b

Weinberg Concertino, Op 42^a. Rhapsody on Moldavian Themes, Op 47 No 3^a

Linus Roth *vn* ^b**José Gallardo** *pf* ^a**Württemberg**

Chamber Orchestra, Heilbronn / Ruben Gazarian

Challenge Classics © CC72680 (55' • DDD/DSD)



Linus Roth follows up on his impressive coupling of Weinberg and Britten concertos

with some equally deserving mid-20th-century *concertante* works, in performances of equally stylish accomplishment. Hartmann's *Concerto funebre* has already had a number of first-rate recordings, and latterly Weinberg's *Concertino* has been catching up. They make a complementary pair – the Hartmann more angular and unpredictable, the Weinberg more lyrical and whimsical, each one inventive, deeply felt and thoroughly distinctive.

To have two premiere recordings into the bargain is quite a bonus. In its original orchestral version and its violin-and-piano transcription, Weinberg's pungently energetic Rhapsody is one of his most often-heard scores. If we take the composer's reported word for it, he also made a version for violin and orchestra, but the whereabouts of that manuscript are currently unknown. Ewelina Nowicka's arrangement works a treat and Roth's playing has all the colouristic flair and rhythmic punch the piece invites.

Finally, Shostakovich's unfinished sonata movement of 1945 gives us another of his intriguing 'false starts' (those for the Fourth and Ninth Symphonies have been recorded; others await). This one reached the middle of its development section because he perhaps realised that the material was more appropriate for a symphony – at any rate he returned to both main ideas eight years later when composing the first movement of the Tenth Symphony. Here again Roth shows musical intelligence and violinistic proficiency in equal measure. The accompaniments are excellent, and it all makes for an eminently collectable disc.

David Fanning

Lutosławski

Piano Concerto^a. Symphony No 2^b

^a**Krystian Zimerman** *pf*

Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra / Simon Rattle

DG © 479 4518GH (52' • DDD)

^bRecorded live at the Philharmonie, Berlin, September 2013



Commissioned by the 1988 Salzburg Festival and first performed by dedicatee Krystian

Zimerman, Lutosławski's Piano Concerto serves up a wealth of a succinct, characteristically deft and urgently communicative invention in four linked movements, while consciously harking back to figures from the past (in this instance Bartók, Szymanowski and Prokofiev). Zimerman's own pioneering recording with the BBC SO conducted by the composer deservedly survives in the catalogue, so it's a real and unexpected treat to be able to welcome a second version from the concerto's most stylish and experienced exponent. Partnered with exemplary polish and unstinting dedication by Rattle and the Berliners, Zimerman is at his patrician, dazzlingly articulate best, locating even greater reserves of concentration and rapt hush than previously in the slow movement (where his sublime touch and gorgeous *cantabile* tone remain things of wonder), while the thrusting momentum and thrilling sense of purpose he and Rattle bring to the chaconne finale make for a giddy culmination. Admittedly, you do occasionally have to contend with some audible humming from the soloist (it didn't worry me one bit, I have to say), and orchestral detail isn't always as sharply delineated as it is on, say, Louis Lortie's admirable account with Edward Gardner and the BBC SO, but don't be deterred from investigating what is a marvellously invigorating and fabulously accomplished reading.

The Second Symphony is a two-movement edifice from 1966-67 couched in a bracingly exploratory idiom which makes excitingly resourceful use of aleatory devices. It's an enigmatic, challenging beast that teems with colouristic flair, astonishingly intricate textures and spooky, otherworldly sonorities (such as the ethereal writing for divided double basses towards the close). Suffice to say, it's delivered with riveting technical mastery here, and, to my ears at any rate, Rattle paces its fretful progress with an even keener sense of direction and unerring proportion than do either Salonen or Gardner. A very fine issue.

Andrew Achenbach

Piano Concerto – selected comparisons:

Zimerman, BBC SO, Lutosławski

(4/92) (DG) 431 664-2GH or 471 588-2GH

Lortie, BBC SO, Gardner (4/12) (CHAN) CHSA5098

Symphony No 2 – selected comparisons:

Los Angeles PO, Salonen (1/97) (SONY) 88765 44083-2

BBC SO, Gardner (12/12) (CHAN) CHSA5106

Mahler

Symphonies – No 7^a; No 8^b; No 9^c

^bSally Matthews, ^bAilish Tynan, ^bSarah Tynan

^{sops} ^bSarah Connolly, ^bAnne-Marie Owens ^{mezs}

^bStefan Vinke ^{ten} ^bMark Stone ^{bar} ^bStephen Gadd

^{bass} ^bBoys of the Eton College Chapel Choir;

^bPhilharmonia Chorus; ^bPhilharmonia Voices;

^bBBC Symphony Chorus; Philharmonia Orchestra

/ Lorin Maazel

Signum © © SIGCD362 (4h 42' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Royal Festival Hall, London,

^aMay 26, October ^c1 & ^b9, 2011



The prospect of a 36-minute first movement for the Ninth (Klemperer's

is 28'18") did not bode well on this final instalment of Lorin Maazel's new Mahler cycle. Even taking into account a powerfully distended first climax, Maazel's last recorded traversal does indeed have trouble holding things together. Beam up 14'40" and the effect is like a battered, blood-gorged whale netted perilously close to death, pitifully exposed and struggling. Caught on the verge of collapse, Mahler's loudly raging gestures seem tragically emasculated. True, the penultimate climax, with its roaring declamation of the movement's opening motif, is imposing – here the slow tempo makes a point of sorts – but the ultimate judgement has to be a regretful rejection of excessive distortion. The second movement lets in more sunlight and a rustic element of the Ländler with it (I'm again reminded of Klemperer's New Philharmonia recording) but the 'Rondo-Burleske' lacks a crucial element of terror. As for the closing *Adagio*, the first few minutes are beautifully drawn, with warm, luminous playing from the Philharmonia strings, but it's not enough to redeem what is in essence a woefully exaggerated reading. Years ago Maazel's Vienna Philharmonic Ninth (Sony, 12/85) came in for some stick, but this new version just about takes the biscuit.

The 1984 Vienna Philharmonic Seventh (also on Sony, 6/86) was a highlight of Maazel's previous Mahler cycle and although this 2011 remake is similarly sardonic and, at times, hedonistic (in the first movement's sunnier moments), it too wants for spontaneity. The opening lurches forwards as if under duress – you can almost smell the sweat – the tempo painfully slow, and once into the *Allegro con fuoco* Mahler's bold resolve has a job establishing itself. The expected sense of yearning a little later on arrives at a premium; and although the mood does eventually lighten, the sum effect is frankly

glum. The first 'Nachtmusik' is rather better, with beautifully balanced sound (especially between brass, strings and timps) and an implied half-smile that suits the music, though the playing at 3'02" momentarily sounds confused. The Vienna strings are more yielding throughout (the violins especially) but Maazel chooses his tempi well and the effect is at least consistent. The verdant middle section, with its bird-like woodwinds, earthy climax and what I always think of as a Mahlerian 'tango' is especially good. Then again the mischievous *Scherzo* is oddly inhibited, quite deadpan in comparison with, say, Kubelík in Munich (either on DG or Audite) or Bernstein (Sony or DG). The second 'Nachtmusik' is, like its sibling at the near side of the *Scherzo*, restrained and gently playful; but when the ragbag finale thunders in, all comes right for a performance where weight of utterance at last seems called for, various musical side-glances make their effect and the closing bars are imposing. Not a great Seventh, and certainly no match for its VPO/Maazel predecessor, but pretty good, especially in the context of the rest of the Philharmonia cycle.

Maazel's Vienna Eighth dates from 1986 and is in general to be preferred to this worthy newcomer. Here the best singers are the sopranos Sally Matthews and Ailish Tynan, while tenor Stefan Vinke, although sounding fully engaged, tends to strain. The opening of 'Veni, Creator Spiritus' packs a fair wallop but surely the 'Imple superna gratia' that follows is too slow. Temperature levels vary (try the somnambulant opening of 'Accede lumen', which does pick up in energy), and although the initial reprise of 'Veni, Creator' is exciting, it's not enough to shift the critical balance away from Tennstedt live (LPO), Bernstein with the LSO (Sony), or Abbado in Berlin (DG). Part 2's 12-minute orchestral opening is the performance's high point – here Maazel fixes the atmosphere with some of his old magic – and baritone Mark Stone delivers his Pater Ecstasticus solo with much feeling. There are delicate moments and the closing 'Alles Vergänglich' is impressive. But moving, humbling, uplifting? Not really. Most of what we hear sounds like a dutiful night's work (all these performances were recorded live at the Royal Festival Hall). The notes are securely in place but not their reason for being there. Tepid might seem like a cruel word to use, especially for a performance of this of all symphonies, but it's not too far from the truth. At least there's no applause to put up with.

So a bit of a disappointment, given that the previous two volumes of this cycle had



Linus Roth: musical intelligence and violinistic proficiency in previously unrecorded works by Weinberg and Shostakovich (review on page 43)

so many good points. Vol 1 (3/14) is, I would say, the one to go for, but in other respects, thinking in terms of Nos 1-9, Kubelík, Haitink (Philips), Gielen (Hänssler), Abbado and Zinman (RCA) would be my first ports of call, with Bernstein (Sony) as an enticing supplement. This set is mainly valuable for those who attended the Southbank concerts. Maybe the more controversial performances came across more compellingly live than they do on disc. **Rob Cowan**

Mendelssohn

Symphonies - No 4, 'Italian', Op 90;
No 5, 'Reformation', Op 107

Tonkünstler Orchestra / Andrés Orozco-Estrada
Oehms © OC1834 (56' • DDD). Recorded live at the Musikverein, Vienna, April 3, 4 & 6, 2014



When reviewing Andrés Orozco-Estrada's coupling of Mendelssohn's First and Third Symphonies (8/14), I concluded by lamenting a certain listlessness in the playing. 'I think I understand what Orozco-Estrada is getting at,' is how I put it at the time, going on to recommend Heinz

Holliger's tighter, more keenly animated version (of the Third Symphony).

Happily, this new CD of the Fourth and Fifth Symphonies is very much more impressive, the *Italian* staking its claim right from the off, with pert woodwinds and lightly expressive strings. Beyond the repeated exposition, Orozco-Estrada cues an exciting development and a sunny recapitulation. The *Andante con moto* second movement benefits from clearly audible flutes (not something to be taken for granted), while the third movement ebbs and flows in a way that is both intimate and pleasingly understated. The closing Saltarello races along without the least sign of sweat or strain, 'Mendelssohnian' in the truest sense of the term.

In the *Reformation* Orozco-Estrada marks a sense of occasion, especially in the opening *Andante* with its otherworldly Dresden Amens, while the ensuing *Allegro con fuoco* is strong and purposeful. The middle movements are by turns breezy and songful, the strings in the latter especially effective. Like Jan Willem de Vriend (Challenge Classics, 3/15), Orozco-Estrada effects a dramatic transition to the finale's *Allegro maestoso* by doubling the tempo, which is undeniably exciting; by keeping the tempo steady, however, Zehetmair

(MDG, 4/14) and Norrington (Hänssler) effect a more natural transition. I'd say that if it's the *Italian* you're after primarily, then Orozco-Estrada offers a viable option among recent contenders, but in the case of the *Reformation* there are better versions to be had elsewhere. **Rob Cowan**

Prokofiev

Symphonies - No 4, Op 47 (1930 version);
No 5, Op 100. Dreams, Op 6

Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra / Kirill Karabits
Onyx © ONYX4147 (77' • DDD)



This third release in Kirill Karabits's Prokofiev symphony cycle will not

disappoint those following its progress. Even if competition could scarcely be more ferocious in the Fifth, pairing it with the original version of the Fourth has few precedents. Valery Gergiev has almost the same coupling (bar the Scriabinesque *Dreams*) in his live LSO series from London's Barbican Hall, only that disc was never made available independently. Unexpectedly, perhaps, it is the Fifth that

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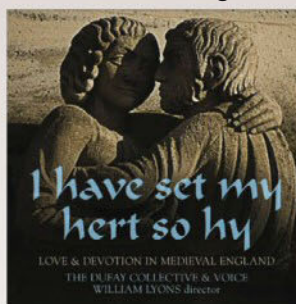
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receives the most convincing treatment in Poole's Lighthouse. Karabits's view, like Litton's, is mainstream in the best sense, neither inclined to rush in the Gergiev manner nor seeming too placid as Alsop sometimes can. For all that Karabits points up the slow movement's contrasting blocks of material with marked tempo shifts, there are no incidental agogic distortions. True, the orchestra is rather thinly upholstered, but this allows for a cleaner, more linear texture than is customary in this score and the conducting avoids the impression of emotional reticence left by Oramo's similarly aerated account. Should you want to hear what Prokofiev's tuba is doing in the Fifth, Karabits is your man.

Nothing wrong, either, with his interpretation of its rarely heard, theatrically indebted predecessor. Then again, this is a work the orchestra can't have encountered before and, in truth, the playing is a little strained, not least in the high-lying string-writing. Turn to the ace sight-readers of Gergiev's LSO and the whole thing flows more convincingly, despite blunter sound and the conductor's intrusive vocalisations. Karabits remakes the music through his typically sensitive and ingenious exposure of inner parts, but I'm not sure how helpful this is if key lyrical lines are undersold.

Don't let me put you off Karabits's deglamourised view. His rhythms are always commendably taut and true, and the disc comes with intriguing interview material in which the conductor refuses to view the Fifth as other than essentially optimistic. The sound recording, while immediate and transparent, is not wholly natural, hall resonance prolonging Prokofiev's grander resolutions. **David Gutman**

Symphonies Nos 4 and 5 – selected comparison:

LSO, Gergiev (6/06) (PHIL) 475 7655

Symphony No 5 – selected comparisons:

São Paulo SO, Alsop (8/12) (NAXO) 8 573029

Finnish RSO, Oramo (12/12) (ONDI) ODE 1181-2

Bergen PO, Litton (6/15) (BIS) BIS2124

Saint-Saëns

Symphony No 3, 'Organ', Op 78^a.

Introduction and Rondo capriccioso, Op 28^b.

La muse et le poète, Op 132^c

^{bc}Noah Geller ^{vn}^cMark Gibbs ^{vc}^aJan Kraybill ^{org}

Kansas City Symphony Orchestra / Michael Stern

Reference Recordings © RR136 (61' • DDD)



There is an appealing family feel to this disc. Rather than parachuting in any headline-catching international soloists, the Kansas City Symphony has enlisted its

concertmaster and principal cello as protagonists in two of the Saint-Saëns works. Noah Geller is soloist in the *Introduction and Rondo capriccioso*, and he is joined by cellist Mark Gibbs in the once rarely heard but now almost ubiquitous *La muse et le poète*. Backed by airy orchestral textures, Geller exudes lyrical warmth and a perky rhythmic spirit in the first work, and in the second he uses the violin's wily flights of fantasy to engage Gibbs's poetic cello in an intimate dialogue.

Then comes the big beast of the programme, but, as always, the crucial test is not so much the volume of the organ but the way in which the orchestral context of the symphony as a whole is established. Here Michael Stern impressively injects impetus into the first section's sinewy fabric, alert to instrumental colour and the contrapuntal discipline and intrigue of the writing. The organ, making its muted first entry in the *Adagio*, is a 5,548-pipe Casavant Frères instrument, an integral part of Kansas City's Kauffman Center for the Performing Arts where the recording was made, as indeed is Jan Kraybill who plays it. Stern crafts a proper, stately *Adagio* but an *Adagio* with momentum and shapely contours, and he ignites real fire in the *Allegro moderato* of the symphony's second part. When the tempo changes to *presto*, the piano's arpeggios and scales are prominent enough to make their point without leaping out at you, just as the organ in the finale asserts its grandeur without overwhelming the orchestral palette.

In all sorts of respects – gleaming sonority, lucid architecture, interpretative stature and sheer dynamic thrill – the 1976 recording by Daniel Barenboim and the Chicago SO, linked up to Gaston Litaize at the organ of Chartres Cathedral, remains in a league of its own. But last year's high-quality release by the Seattle Symphony under Ludovic Morlot of a recording made in the city's Benaroya Hall, with the orchestra's staff organist Joseph Adam, showed that you don't need globally fêted artists to craft a performance of finesse, luminosity and drama. This Kansas recording is another case in point. Even in a competitive market, this version has a distinct edge. **Geoffrey Norris**

'Organ' Symphony – selected comparisons:

Litaize, Chicago SO, Barenboim

(4/76^a, 4/87^b) (DG) 474 612-2GOR

Adam, Seattle SO, Morlot (A/14) (SEAT) SSM1002

Schoenberg

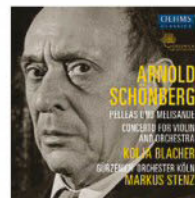
Pelleas und Melisande, Op 5.

Violin Concerto, Op 36^a

^aKolja Blacher ^{vn}

Cologne Gürzenich Orchestra / Markus Stenz

Oehms © OC445 (70' • DDD)



If this 2013 studio recording of *Pelleas und Melisande* lacks the clarity and conviction

of the same team's magnificent *Gurrelieder* (Hyperion, 8/15), the fault must lie largely with the composer. Bass detail casts a gothic shadow over the opening evocation of Allemonde and Markus Stenz creates space around the baleful 'fate' motif without compromising a strong sense of pulse, which takes Schoenberg's tempo relationships at his word. But as soon as more than half the huge orchestra enters, the work collapses into the dimensions of a symphonic jellyfish. For tonal refinement, Karajan and the BPO (DG, 9/89) are still without rival; for dramatic impact, Boulez in Chicago (Erato, 4/93).

The Cologne orchestra's fairly lightweight tonal profile on record is heard to better advantage in a classically moulded account of the Violin Concerto. Like Hilary Hahn, Kolja Blacher has clearly absorbed lessons from the work's early interpreters such as Louis Krasner and Rudolf Kolisch in not allowing the solo part to be tied up in soliloquising knots of contrapuntal introspection – Schoenberg plays Hamlet – and he has grasped the work as a whole in its Brahmsian oscillation between violence and rhapsody. His relationship with the orchestra is strong – try the ghostly figures of a waltz traded between them at 2'45" in the first movement – and he makes a muscular but never ugly case for the finale in the virtuoso tradition. Ultimately, however, the urgency, intensity, wit and passion of Hahn's partnership with Salonen are still outstanding. **Peter Quantrill**

Violin Concerto – selected comparison:

Hahn, Swedish RSO, Salonen (6/08) (DG) 477 7346GH

Schumann

Piano Concerto, Op 54^a. Piano Trio No 2, Op 80^b

Alexander Melnikov ^{pf}^bIsabelle Faust ^{violin}

^bJean-Guihen Queyras ^{vc}^aFreiburg Baroque

Orchestra / Pablo Heras-Casado

Harmonia Mundi © (CD + DVD) HMC90 2198

(57' • DDD)



Melnikov, Faust and Queyras continue their series of Schumann's concertos and piano trios with the Piano Concerto and the second of the three trios, the former among the most-performed of 19th-century concertos, the latter perhaps less often

heard than its two sister works. As with the previous instalment (Faust in the Violin Concerto; the late Third Trio – 3/15), period instruments and styles are deployed, in the case of the concerto an 1837 Erard piano – naturally a lighter instrument than the modern behemoths on which this music is most usually heard these days, and one which thus matches the sonorities of the Freiburg Baroque players more closely. Melnikov is able to ripple along as part of an ensemble when providing accompaniment to orchestral lines, rather than dominating as a Steinway might, although the instrument can still roar when called upon to do so. And the duetting with the woodwinds is a particular delight – for example with the clarinet and oboe in the first movement's major-key exposition of the theme (from 2'27"), although the clarinet might have been spotlighted in the mix with a touch more presence.

After the light-footed intermezzo, some may cavil at the moderate tempo taken for the finale. However, when played, as here, with Melnikov's imagination, the effect is not only to reveal the ingenious construction and orchestration of the work but also – given the swing that he and Heras-Casado impart to it – to show how closely it is related to the galumphing polonaise that closes the Violin Concerto. Repeated listening has persuaded me that this is a valid alternative to the glittering virtuosity displayed by pianists from Lipatti to Andsnes and beyond.

The Second Piano Trio too responds well to the period-instrument treatment, its opening movement bounding along with intriguing shading from Faust and Queyras, the slow movement warm but unindulgent, the sighing *Scherzo* betraying its affinity to the same movement of Schubert's E flat Trio. Schumann said that the Second Trio 'makes a friendlier and more immediate impression' than the First and the finale demonstrates this, its playful and generous melodic outpouring clearly enjoyed to the full by these three players. **David Threasher**

Schumann

Symphonies – No 1, 'Spring', Op 38; No 2, Op 61; No 3, 'Rhenish', Op 97; No 4, Op 120
Odense Symphony Orchestra / Simon Gaudenz
 CPO ② CPO777 925-2 (124' • DDD/DSD)



Schumann symphony cycles have been arriving thick and fast recently, from Nézet-Séguin, Ticciati and Rattle. And not so many years ago CPO issued a set under

Frank Beermann (12/10). So this issue already falls under quite a long shadow; recorded over a period of two years from June 2011 to April 2013, the timing of its release can only be considered unfortunate.

It's not clear why CPO would wish to replace the 2010 Beermann issue so soon, especially given the present near-saturation of the Schumann market. Do Gaudenz and his Danes match up to the finest of the recent sets? These are spirited, full-orchestral, modern-instrument performances captured in an acoustic (the Carl Nielsen Hall in Odense) that clarifies lines. Perhaps woodwinds don't penetrate as much or have the same personality as on the recordings mentioned above; strings are also a little scrappy *in extremis*.

The main problem, though, is Gaudenz's over-literal approach to tempo. The more experienced conductors are able to bring the music to life by pulling gently against the pulse, easing into second subjects or changes of texture. Gaudenz tends to stick rigidly to his chosen metronome mark so the sonata drama of outer movements seems somewhat muted. Repeated figures tend to be played without inflection to prevent them becoming monotonous; perhaps the most damaging example being the obsessive rhythms of the opening movement of the Second, that classic place where unimaginative phrasing goes to die. The Third Symphony (the earliest to be recorded) perhaps comes off best, although the 'Cologne Cathedral' movement has little of that awe-struck time-stands-still atmosphere that Nézet-Séguin and Ticciati locate. A heroic timpanist (with hard sticks) tries to whip up some excitement at climaxes but is rather a lone voice. **David Threasher**

Selected comparisons:

COE, Nézet-Séguin (5/14) (DG) 479 2437GH2

BPO, Rattle (6/14) (BPO) BPHR140011

SCO, Ticciati (9/14) (LINN) CKD450

Shostakovich

Piano Concertos – No 1, Op 35^a; No 2, Op 102^b.
 Concertino, Op 94^c. Tarantella^c

Anna Vinnitskaya, Ivan Rudin pfs ^a**Tobias Willner**
 tpt ^{ab}**Kremerata Baltica**; ^{ab}**Staatskapelle Dresden**
 Alpha ⑤ ALPHA203 (50' • DDD)



Anna Vinnitskaya not only plays the Concerto for piano, trumpet and strings with consummate agility and clarity, she also directs the very spruce-sounding Kremerata Baltica and the woodwind of the Dresden Staatskapelle. This is an achievement in itself, and caps should be

doffed accordingly. Her playing is slightly softer-grained than some but that is no bad thing. The composer himself may have been more brittle in touch and more abandoned in phrasing, but a more level-headed approach brings out perfectly valid alternative shades of meaning.

Vinnitskaya's booklet statement makes much of the importance of what lies behind the facade of the Second Concerto, a work she has apparently played from the age of 11. This is a truism, maybe, but reasonable enough. Again, her approach is poetically inflected without ever descending into slushiness, and she could never be accused of ugliness of tone or of using the piece as a vehicle for empty display. The only problem is that Alexander Melnikov, for one, has gone a good deal further in probing for subtext, and he does so with a wider range of touch, a stronger personal presence and, especially in the slow movement, greater imaginative daring. As for the fast movements, with Vinnitskaya the music glows; with Melnikov it ignites.

These days the two concertos alone would be regarded as seriously short measure. But what to put with them is not an easy choice. Two of Shostakovich's pieces for two pianos are a perfectly reasonable offering and they are here dispatched with winning vivacity. It seems ungrateful to note that there would have been room for the early Suite, Op 6, as well; but in a crowded marketplace this would certainly have made for a stronger unique selling point. **David Fanning**

Selected comparisons:

Melnikov, Mahler CO, Currentzis

(5/12) (HARM) HMC90 2104

Shostakovich, French Nat Rad Orch, Chytenis

(10/61^a, A/03^b) (WARN) 2564 61550-1

Sibelius

Belshazzar's Feast^a. Overture in E. Scène de ballet. The Language of the Birds – Wedding March. Cortège. Menuetto. Processional, Op 113 No 6

^a**Pia Pajala sop**

Turku Philharmonic Orchestra / Leif Segerstam
 Naxos ⑧ 8 573300 (63' • DDD • T/t)



This is the second volume in Naxos's new series of less familiar gems from the pen of Jean Sibelius. Top billing goes to the complete incidental music that the Finnish master supplied for a 1906 production in Helsinki's Swedish Theatre of Hjalmar Procopé's drama *Belshazzar's Feast*. A genuinely rewarding achievement it comprises, too: try the haunting 'Song of the Jewish Girl' from Act 2 (delivered with

plangent expression by soprano Pia Pajala), the ravishing 'Notturmo' (with its inspired writing for solo flute), or the vernally fresh 'Dance of Life' and contrastingly sinister 'Dance of Death' (which Sibelius amalgamated into a single movement for the concert suite).

It's followed here by the intriguingly nervy 'Wedding March' from *The Language of the Birds* (intended for Adolph Paul's eponymous 1911 play but seemingly never used) and the festive polonaise entitled *Cortège* (1905); thematic ideas from the latter made their way into the exquisite 'Love Song' from the second set of *Scènes historiques* (1912) and concluding procession from *The Tempest* (1925). Elsewhere, the outer portions of the charming *Menuetto* (1894) reappear in rather more restrained guise in the context of the *King Christian II* incidental music, while the very late *Processional* (1938) contains a falling sequence that momentarily recalls the climax of the Fourth Symphony's slow movement. The programme kicks off with the endearingly garrulous Overture in E and exuberant, at times slightly madcap *Scène de ballet*, both dating from 1891 and originally conceived as the first two movements of an aborted symphony (unmistakable echoes of the *Karelia* music and *Kullervo* abound).

Leif Segerstam directs all this material with unfailing perception and secures some commendably watchful playing from his excellent Turku band. Sound, too, is undistractingly truthful, full-bodied and atmospheric, and there are useful notes by Dominic Wells. Roll on the next instalment!


Andrew Achenbach

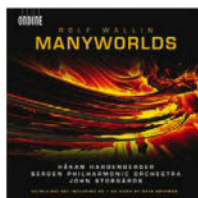
Wallin

Fisher King[®]. Id. Manyworlds

[®]Håkan Hardenberger tpt

Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra / John Storgårds

Ondine Ⓢ (CD +  ODE1267-2D (75' • DDD • 24bit/96kHz • DTS-HD MA5.0 & PCM stereo)



Rolf Wallin's trumpet concerto echoes the myth of the wounded Fisher King whose

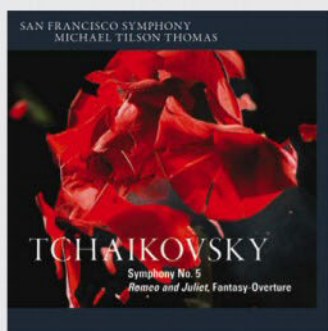
country degenerates into a wasteland. The 'openness' of the trumpet 'lends it a vulnerability', observes Wallin in the booklet. And while his writing for the instrument might cover its whole range and include ear-boggling techniques that perhaps only Håkan Hardenberger could pull off, the soloist seems, like the Fisher King himself, somehow incapacitated –

recoiling, often stuck on a set of adjacent notes, always sounding uncannily human. Technically it's a model not just of evocation through restraint and Nordic order (Wallin's frosted-glass orchestration is beguiling in its own wasteland of obliqueness and deceit), but it's also a piece that manages to plot a firm narrative through sonic tension alone, without recourse to 'show and tell'.

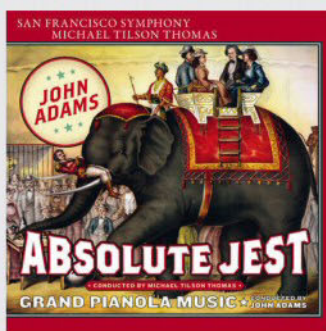
Wallin admits that the orchestral work *Id* (1982) is that of 'an inexperienced composer', and in truth I hear more isolated gestures in this piece (including the swarming strings that have become a Nordic music cliché) and less tension and line, despite another remarkable ending. Perhaps that reflects the 'unorganised part of the human brain' that the Freudian title evokes.

But in *Manyworlds* (2010), despite the odd string swarm, we're back to vintage Wallin: a composer whose handling of a large orchestra can have the same pinhead acuity of his ensemble works, and who isn't afraid to alight on something simple and attempt to unlock its poetry through enforced repetition. The remarkable central string section is akin to the apotheosis of *Fisher King* when both soloist and orchestra become lodged on a repeating, doleful gesture for nearly four

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minutes – alarming, arresting and formally cleansing in both cases.

John Storgårds's very physical readings underline the structural engineering in all the music here and the Bergen Philharmonic revel in Wallin's varied dark colours. I find Boya Bøckman's accompanying video to *Manyworlds* vague, disconnected from the unfurling score in the way Tal Rosner's images for Adès's *In Seven Days* never are. Still, there is much subtle, delectable and individual writing on this release, which bodes well for Wallin's operatic collaboration with Mark Ravenhill that lands at the Oslo Opera House next year. **Andrew Mellor**

'French Flute Concertos'

Blavet Flute Concerto in A minor **Boismortier**

Flute Concerto, Op 21 No 3 – Affettuoso

Buffardin Flute Concerto in E minor **Corrette**

Flute Concerto, Op 4 No 4 – Adagio **Leclair** Flute Concerto, Op 7 No 3 **Naudot** Flute Concerto, Op 17 No 5

Les Buffardins / Frank Theuns fl/picc

Accent Ⓢ ACC24297 (60' • DDD)



They are precise and very accomplished. We cannot ask for better technique from Les

Buffardins. But a group of only two violins plus one each of viola, cello and double bass has in this recording a loud, thick-textured sound. Harpsichord is dominant, the performances chug. Reduce your usual volume level steeply to achieve transparency, a realistic balance between instruments and a spry buoyancy in rhythm. The change is dramatic, clarifying too the divisions sometimes marked *tutti* and *solo*, the latter for the soloist accompanied only by basso continuo which could include keyboard. Small crosses above notes denote a need for trills, or other ornamentation left to a performer's discretion.

Title notwithstanding, only three pieces – by Blavet, Buffardin and Corrette – are written specifically for flute. Leclair's was originally for violin, Naudot's for hurdy-gurdy, Boismortier's for musette. Recommended alternatives are flute, recorder or oboe. Frank Theuns uses a piccolo for Naudot, a transverse flute for the others. As director he shapes the string-writing as he feels it; and as soloist, he also senses the spaces between notes and expresses them through nuances of tone, dynamics and phrasing, eg the *Adagio* of Leclair's Concerto, where Theuns takes the initiative to play a section over a pedal E (from 4'02" to 4'28") as an

unmarked cadenza with an improvisatory feel. It's a valid interpretative decision in a slow movement of some depth, as are others in these artistically crafted works. Theuns and Les Buffardins take them seriously. But the caveat: watch the volume. **Nalen Anthoni**

'Les grandes répétitions'

Two films by **Luc Ferrari** and **Gérard Patris**

'**Karlheinz Stockhausen: Momente**' (1965)

Martina Arroyo sop **Alfons & Aloys Kontarsky** elec

orgs **Choir and Orchestra of the Westdeutscher**

Rundfunk / Karlheinz Stockhausen

'**Hommage à Edgard Varèse**' (1965)

Déserts (rehearsal)^a. Ionisation^b

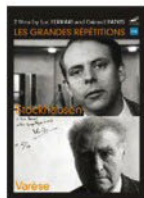
^a**Domaine Musicale Orchestra / Bruno Maderna**;

^b**Ensemble Instrumentale de Musique**

Contemporaine de Paris / Konstantin Simonovic

Mode Ⓢ  MODE276 (111' • NTSC •

4:3 • b&w • PCM mono • O • s)



Perhaps one way to guarantee a hit-rate of better, more informed television music

documentaries would be to hand composers a stack of money and commission them to make programmes about their own kind. Between 1965 and '68, the French composer Luc Ferrari collaborated with the television director Gérard Patris on a series of composer portraits which were broadcast as *Les grandes répétitions* ('The Great Rehearsals'), programmes which have since become the stuff of new-music legend – and were virtually impossible to see. But now Mode Records has dusted down two episodes and given them English subtitles.

Hommage à Edgard Varèse had been meant to be centred around an interview with Varèse himself but, sadly, the great man died shortly before the film went into production. So Ferrari produced instead a profoundly moving obituary featuring a fantasy football team of talking heads: Xenakis, Boulez, Messiaen, Marcel Duchamp, Pierre Schaeffer and Hermann Scherchen. Konstantin Simonovic conducts a swinging *Ionisation*, and Bruno Maderna leads a rehearsal of *Déserts* and talks up Varèse's concern for the future of mankind.

But first up is Karlheinz Stockhausen, recorded during rehearsals for *Momente* in Cologne in 1965. For all Stockhausen's influence during this time, period footage of him is surprisingly scarce. We're used to seeing him in his creative dotage, decked out in suits of pure messianic white; and how valuable it is to have this record of a younger and more playful Stockhausen, dressed like a trendy geography teacher in

a corduroy jacket and looking uncannily like Peter Hitchens.

It's clear that, from all their coy giggles and flirty eye movements, Stockhausen is determined to charm the pants off his (always off-camera) female interviewer. But she extracts answers of unusual clarity from the dodecaphonic lothario. Stockhausen gives a down-beat and the chorus of the WDR Orchestra start applauding – what's all that about, Stockhausen's interviewer asks. Applause, he responds, is a universal response to music; how interesting to build a piece from that collective truth, transforming the hubbub of applause into functioning rhythms and pitches, and later into harmonic sumptuousness. Stockhausen's solo soprano is Martina Arroyo, with whom Bernstein recorded Beethoven's Ninth and *Missa solemnis*. She embraces the commotion with understanding and devotion, and a cheeky sense of humour. **Philip Clark**

'Insomnia'

Britten Nocturne, Op 60^a **Buck/Mills/Stipe** I've

been high (arr Tognetti)^a **F Couperin** Les

barricades mystérieuses (arr Adès) **Dean**

Pastoral Symphony **Gurney** Sleep^a

(arr Farrington) **Lennon/McCartney** Blackbird^a

(arr Farrington) **Ligeti** Poème symphonique

^a**Allan Clayton** ten

Aurora Orchestra / Nicholas Collon

Warner Classics Ⓢ 2564 60822-3 (59' • DDD)



How do you listen to an album? I ask because it will have a significant impact on your

enjoyment of 'Insomnia' – the latest release from Britain's punky young Aurora Orchestra. It's a disc that started life as a concert, and while its eclectic (some will say wilfully broad) repertoire worked startlingly well as a live experience, it's harder to see how it translates to private listening practices – rarely immersive, often fragmented.

Themed around sleep and night, Aurora's programme looks like a musical kleptomaniac's horde: Gurney, Britten, John Lennon, Couperin, Ligeti, REM. As soon as you settle into one mood or mode you find yourself thrust suddenly into another. If this were any other group you could dismiss it as gimmickry and move on, but Aurora – joined here by British tenor Allan Clayton – are such persuasive performers, such believers in their musical cause, that it forces you to look and listen again.

At the heart of the programme is Brett Dean's 15-minute *Pastoral Symphony* – an urgent, at times violent vision of nature trampled under the concrete feet of urban

expansion. Dean's orchestral colours are no less vivid than his sampled natural sounds, all strung together by a propulsive rhythms, brought out with tremendous control and clarity by conductor Nicholas Collon and his fine musicians.

Britten's *Nocturne* – recorded, satisfyingly, in Croydon's Fairfield Halls, as Britten and Pears's own recording was – is beautifully delivered by Clayton, who only grows in vocal muscularity and expressive delicacy with every year. His sensitive way with text brings clarity even to Coleridge's knotty verse. Elsewhere he does an excellent impersonation of a King's Singer in Iain Farrington's arrangement of 'Blackbird' but can't quite find Stipe-ian levels of anguish for REM's 'I've been high'.

It's unclear what Ligeti's *Poème symphonique* (scored for 100 metronomes) adds musically (the symbolism is ear-batteringly clear), and it sits at the centre of the programme as a sonic reminder that not all great concepts can thrive in the circumscribed, abstract world of pure sound. This is immersive musical theatre without the theatre or the immersion, which leaves us with just a bold and slightly barmy collection of music – skilfully played, but to what end?

Alexandra Coghlan

'Sommernachtskonzert'

Grieg Piano Concerto, Op 16^a. **Peer Gynt** – Suite No 1 **Lumbye** Kopenhagener Eisenbahn-Dampf-Galopp **Nielsen** Maskarade – Overture **Sibelius** Finlandia **Sinding** Frühlingsrauschen **R Strauss** Wiener Philharmoniker Fanfare

^aRudolf Buchbinder pf

Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra / Zubin Mehta

Sony Classical © 8887507577-2 (70' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Schönbrunn Palace, Vienna, May 14, 2015



Perhaps the most remarkable thing about this disc is the sound quality. It is a concert recorded in a kind of transparent aircraft hangar situated a good walk down the gently sloping gardens from Schönbrunn Palace in Vienna. From the vivid sound captured by Teldex Studio Berlin, the Vienna Phil might be in the Musikverein or a regular recording studio. One thing's for certain: the punters in row 85 of the Schloss seating will not have heard this mixed programme of works by northern European composers with quite the same immediacy and depth as you and me sitting in our armchairs. The audience

applause is (rightly) retained but seems to come from somewhere near the city centre.

But who is this disc for? Will you buy it to hear Richard Strauss's *Vienna Philharmonic Fanfare* (1924)? It's a rarity but quite short, as is the fulsome orchestral version by Hans Sitt of Sinding's once ubiquitous *Rustle of Spring* (an odd choice for a summer concert). In between come the overture to Nielsen's opera *Maskarade* and a portentous but satisfying account of Grieg's Piano Concerto from Rudolf Buchbinder.

You may want to have in your collection the VPO's first performance since 1894 (!) of the *Peer Gynt* Suite No 1 – 'Åse's Death' is meltingly played, though I thought the Mountain King's shenanigans more Tyrolean than Norwegian. I've heard *Finlandia* conveyed more powerfully in other hands – the great 'hymn tune' is a mere contrasted interlude lacking weight and dignity. However, you really ought to hear the encore: a terrific performance of Lumbye's wonderfully silly *Copenhagen Steam Railway Galop*.

Rather than a disc for repeated listening, it is more a pleasant *souvenir d'occasion* for those enjoying an early summer concert in agreeable surroundings, albeit bathed, according to the booklet photos, in lurid green and purple lighting. **Jeremy Nicholas**



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Bernstein's Kaddish Symphony

Philip Clark meets conductor **Marin Alsop** to discuss the composer's deeply personal 1963 work

That's a beautiful thing!' Marin Alsop gasps admiringly as, from the depths of my bag, I proudly scoop out my score of Leonard Bernstein's *Kaddish* Symphony (his third) – the original Schirmer edition, no less, into which I lovingly sank my student loan in 1995. Alsop's score is Boosey & Hawkes's more recent reprint of the same basic engraving, although glued-in flaps of paper give the game away. This is a version Alsop has collated herself. Cuts made in time for Bernstein's 1977 re-recording of his symphony with the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra have been reinstated, alongside the first version of his text, narrated by Claire Bloom for Alsop's recording, soon to be released on Naxos.

'This symphony and *Mass* are Bernstein's most controversial works,' Alsop tells me, 'and by far the biggest problem – more than the atonal writing – is the part for speaker. *Kaddish* is Bernstein's dialogue with God. The symphony, its title referencing the Jewish prayer for the dead, is about his relationship to Judaism, to his father, to his wife and to sexuality. He wrote the original narration for his wife, Felicia Montealegre, and then revised it for a male speaker, which I think was a terrible idea. Having a woman being the one who questions God makes the piece even more powerful and multilayered because, in organised religion, the woman's role was always subservient.'

We open the score and immediately I'm teleported back to a sound world that, back in the day, used to speak to me so directly. No other Bernstein piece dared start like this: with a chorus sustaining a clustery low-pitched hum, each chorus member choosing their note at random. Bernstein's Second Symphony (*The Age of Anxiety*) mulched Bartók, Stravinsky, Mahler, Shostakovich and Lennie Tristano inside a construct that managed to sound like all – but none – of them. But *Kaddish* drops anchor inside Modernity: 12-tone music, Cage, Ligeti, Messiaen. Bernstein grapples with the compositional zeitgeist, peeling away layers of atonality and outbursts of aleatoricism to reveal increasingly warm and ripening tonality underneath.

'The journey of this symphony,' Alsop explains, 'from atonality towards tonality symbolised a huge issue for Bernstein in terms of being accepted as a composer. He endured stinging criticism for writing such tonal music, and in this piece atonality becomes a symbol of crisis, an erosion of fundamentals and of faith, while tonality symbolises unity and hope.'

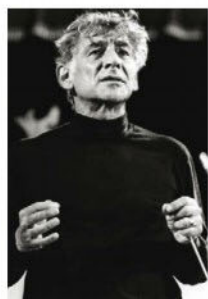


Bolstering Bernstein: Alsop continues her championship of the music of her mentor

A game-changing marker in the piece, she suggests, occurs with the first appearance of a key signature two-thirds of the way through – straddling the mathematically significant golden mean section, a structural trick of the trade much beloved of Bartók. How important, traversing the atonal opening, is it to keep this tonal goal in mind? 'Certainly it's important to know exactly where we're headed,' she responds. 'At the golden mean the solo soprano enters for the first time. A magical moment. But trying to "melodicise" or soften the angularity and hardness of the opening would be a mistake. Bernstein wanted listeners to feel all at sea.'

Bar 1. We stare at that opening cluster, and this is more than an effect, I suggest; the structural knock-back of that unlikely opening gambit is felt throughout the symphony. 'Did you hear his Norton lectures?' Alsop asks. 'Bernstein is convinced that the first word ever uttered was sung, the substructure of all language, which led to the beginning of civilisation. So having the chorus begin like this was very important to him. The voice without words. And language only gradually emerges.'

Two bars after letter C: a naked, winding tone row appears in the alto saxophone. 'This is, famously, about the most lyrical tone row ever written,' Alsop smiles. 'And you realise



The historical view

Leonard Bernstein
Letter to David Diamond, 1963

'I have not yet finished my 3rd Symphony (*Kaddish*) which will be *something* when and if it gets written. I had hoped by now to have it complete. Alas. Once I have finished it, I can rest in peace: it is my *Kaddish* for everybody.'

Colin Wilson
Brandy of the Damned, 1967

'If a world poll were taken to decide the worst piece of music ever written, I imagine this symphony would stand pretty high in the results [...] John Kennedy was accident-prone, but nothing quite as bad as this ever overtook him while he was alive.'

Barry Seldes
Leonard Bernstein, 2009

'*Kaddish* was a theatrical work billed as a symphony, a product of Bernstein's search for a form that would cross through symphonic, operatic, and Broadway genres to express social and political ideas fit for the coming age.'

how melodically interrelated the symphony is when the soprano's first entry, later in the piece, is accompanied by a solo cor anglais ['Kaddish 2' – four bars after B], its intervals "tonalised" with thirds and sixths. This melody, which seems to me Brahmsian, dominates the rest of the piece.' (Bernstein, as if it matters, stretches the basic rules of serial composition: his tone row is centred harmonically by a recurring F sharp that implies allegiance to the key of G. Take all those F sharps away and you're in for quite an atonal ride. Go on, give it a whirl. It's fun.)


Back to the earlier part of 'Kaddish 1': following further atonal scene-setting wanderings, the chorus finally enter – with words, and a thump. Literally. Bernstein instructs them to rise with a foot-stamp (two bars after A) that boots the orchestra and choir into a 7/8 lunge. The finger-snaps of *West Side Story* – which put fidgety human interaction inside his evocation of the enormity of New York City – have migrated into accented hand clapping. 'It kicks in – finally,' Alsop says. 'The opening has outlined what the chorus are going to say and here they are saying it. All that clapping and stamping is rooted in the core of Jewish choral tradition.'

'But later there's a moment that breaks all the choral conventions – a descent into chaos. A choral cadenza [three bars after letter M in the 'Din-Torah' section] subdivides the chorus into eight sections, each with its own tempo and indication, which are led from inside each section. The danger is that it can sound extremely tame. Choirs instinctively want to be together, singing with a homogenised sound. But this must sound unstable – utterly insane, in fact.'

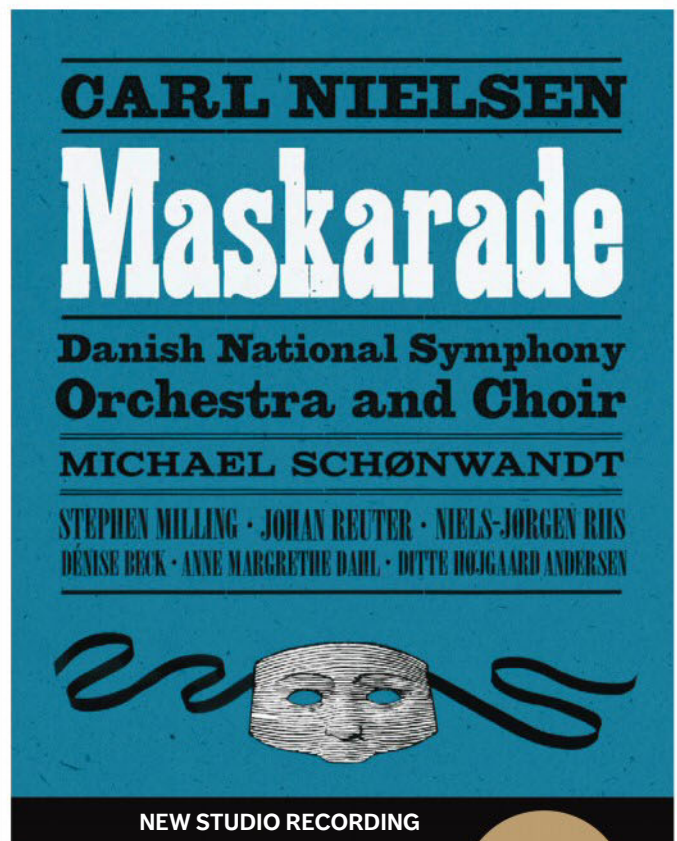
'There's unease, an ominousness, so when we reach the tonal section, talk of belief really counts for something' – *Marin Alsop*

Alsop tells me that extracting the right approach from her chorus involved turning conductorly thumbscrews. But this point of fissure at the end of the 'Din-Torah', I suggest, is perhaps the only conceivable end point for a movement that opened with an apparently free-form cadenza for the percussion section: David Tudor meets Messiaen's *Turangalila*. Throughout *Kaddish*, I say, Bernstein notates the freefall of randomness with impeccable precision.

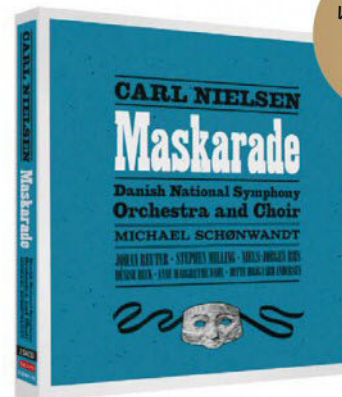
"Din-Torah" really is about ambiguity,' Alsop reflects. 'Bernstein, in his text, introduces the idea of a rainbow – and the symbolism is exactly what you're thinking. The words are ambiguous and so is the rhythm. The percussion cadenza: is it written out? Is it completely free? Really, you can't tell. And all this adds to a sense of unease, an ominous quality, so that when we finally reach the tonal section, the talk of belief really counts for something. The choral cadenza is really an anticipation of the cathartic breakdown in *Mass*, when the celebrant shatters the chalice. After the cadenza, the speaker becomes the comforter of God – which is quite a thing; God can't exist unless I exist because God is created by me.'

Approaching the last few bars, Alsop was keen to reinstate Bernstein's cut: some rapidly descending choral clusters which, she says, clearly echo the opening. 'As Bernstein was finishing, JFK was shot and the symphony was dedicated to his memory. Clearly he wanted to do more for Kennedy – and in this piece you hear the seeds of *Mass*.' 

► The review of Alsop's recording of the *Kaddish* will appear in the Awards issue



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Chamber



Harriet Smith listens to two new discs of Mendelssohn's Trios:

'The Sitkovetsky are particularly compelling in the finale, with a palpable sense of elation at the switch to the major' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 58**



David Threasher on a new live album from Argerich and friends:

'There are so many good things here, all given the extra frisson of live performance, that it's hard to pick a favourite.' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 60**

Beethoven

Six String Quartets, Op 18

Jerusalem Quartet

Harmonia Mundi (M) © HMC90 2207/8 (153' • DDD)



With Haydn, Mozart and Schubert under their belt, it was only a matter of time before

the Jerusalem Quartet turned their attention to Beethoven. Their only previous taster was a recording of Op 18 No 6, coupled with Ravel and Dvořák, from more than a decade ago. As you'd expect from this group, personality, integrity and lustrous tone are all high on the agenda. The slow movement of No 1, for instance, is given at a relatively brisk pace, avoiding all temptation to over-romanticise it; but, by making the chugging accompaniment relatively prominent, there's a sense of unease as the melody struggles to make itself heard. They are alive to the drama of Beethoven's all-important silences too.

Others may find more extremes in this set of quartets. The third movement of the Third can sound more febrile – as the Takács ably demonstrate in the Trio, with its sharply pointed hairpin dynamics – while in the finale of the same work the Jerusalem are a touch gentler than the Takács, the irrepressible Lindsays and the supreme Hungarian Quartet, while the Talich (on Calliope) put more emphasis on a sense of wistfulness. The Jerusalem's Fourth Quartet is a particular highlight, from the irresistibly characterful viola-playing, a first-movement development full of fire and intensity and a third movement that seems to be paced just right, and in the coda of the finale they really throw caution to the wind, similar in approach to the thrilling Takács but with a more refulgent sound.

They capture well the very different worlds of each quartet, and the variation-form slow movement of No 5 is given with plenty of charm, the trill-infused fifth variation sounding truly unbuttoned. Even if the Hungarian are peerless here in the

interplay between musicians in the chattering finale, the Jerusalem run them close, the ending warmly insouciant.

The Sixth Quartet certainly doesn't lack for energy in the first movement, a whisper faster than the Takács and more gleeful than the Belcea. In the slow movement their characteristically rich tone again comes into its own, while the contrast between the finale's mysterious opening and the ensuing *Allegretto* is potently conveyed. Add to that a wonderfully naturalistic recording and you have a triumphant addition to the bulging Beethoven catalogue. **Harriet Smith**

Op 18 – selected comparisons:

Hungarian Qt (11/54^R, 1/55^R) (REGI) ► RRC7011 or (HERI) ► HTGCDM045

Lindsay Qt (1/80^R) (RESO) RSB801

Takács Qt (4/04) (DECC) 470 848-2DH2

Belcea Qt (1/13^R, 8/13^R) (ZZT) ZZT344

Beethoven

'Sonatas for Fortepiano and Violin, Vol 1'

Violin Sonatas – No 4, Op 23;

No 9, 'Kreutzer', Op 47

Susanna Ogata *vn* Ian Watson *fp*

Coro Connections (C) COR16138 (58' • DDD)



Anyone who has heard a classical Viennese fortepiano live will know that it's not an

especially strong instrument; recordings, however, can create a quite different impression. So it is here, a powerful fortepiano sound enhancing the impact of performances notable for their energy and rhythmic drive. The effect is particularly striking in the passionate outer movements of Op 23 and the first *Presto* of the *Kreutzer*. An uncompromising impression, it could be argued, is entirely appropriate for the young Beethoven, yet there is a downside in the lack of any really soft playing, at least from the piano. Listen to the theme and first variation of Op 47's *Andante* and you'll be struck by the excessively forceful effect in music that should charm through its tenderness and grace.

Part of the problem may be a lack of subtlety of touch in Ian Watson's playing. Certainly the performance of the *Kreutzer* by Kristian Bezuidenhout and Viktoria Mullova impresses, not only through its superior balance but in the fine distinctions Bezuidenhout makes between different dynamic levels and types of *staccato*. Furthermore, while many of Watson's loud chords have a crashing, explosive sound that's not entirely pleasant, Bezuidenhout's more careful balancing of sonority (and his awareness that pianists of Beethoven's time would habitually spread chords) ensures that forcefulness never turns to crudity.

It seems a shame not to respond with more enthusiasm to playing with many good qualities – not least Susanna Ogata's ability to sound expressive with minimal vibrato, and the duo's clear enjoyment of the witty exchanges in the middle movement of Op 23. But the issues of sound and balance predominate.

Duncan Druce

Kreutzer Sonata – selected comparison:

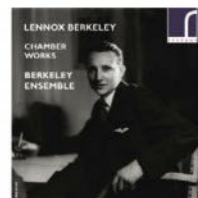
Mullova, Bezuidenhout (9/10) (ONYX) ONYX4050

L Berkeley

String Trio, Op 19. Sextet, Op 47. Introduction and Allegro, Op 80. Sonatine. Pièce. In memoriam Igor Stravinsky. Three Pieces

Berkeley Ensemble

Resonus (R) RES10149 (60' • DDD)



This brilliant young ensemble, formed from members of the Southbank Sinfonia

in 2008, made a strong impact in their debut recording (5/14). This release is just as polished and – featuring a single composer – better focused. Lennox Berkeley's chamber music is increasingly gaining international recognition: there are two German recordings of the immaculate String Trio (1943), which gets a fine performance here. The three performers are ideally balanced and their ensemble is impeccable. That also applies to the Sextet (1955) for clarinet,



'The sheer robust joy and commitment are hard to resist': Ars Antiqua Austria play Biber on a new disc for Challenge Classics

horn and string quartet, more involved with counterpoint than the Trio. Invention sparkles throughout. The Introduction and Allegro for double bass and piano is lumberingly effective and makes a valuable repertoire piece in an area not well served.

Then there are first recordings. Berkeley was famously dismissive about his early works – and wrong. He regularly lost them or just left them in Paris with his teacher, Nadia Boulanger, and got some of them back only after she died in 1979. The *Sonatine* for clarinet and piano was written in 1928, the second year of Berkeley's studies in Paris. Boulanger must have been pleased with it since it shows complete command of what the two instruments can do separately and together. There's a mature control of the discourse, its ebb and flow, and the slow movement is eloquent.

Finally, a few *pièces d'occasion*. A canon for string quartet *In memoriam Igor Stravinsky*, *Pièce*, another lively student work, and the unknown Three Pieces for solo viola were found in a second-hand bookshop in Camden a decade ago. Informative notes from Berkeley's biographer Tony Scotland complete a fascinating release – well recorded too. **Peter Dickinson**

Biber

Sonatae tam aris quam aulis servientes

Ars Antiqua Austria / Gunar Letzbor *vn*

Challenge Classics © CC72676 (69' • DDD/DSD)



The *Sonatae tam aris quam aulis servientes* were Biber's first published works, issued

in 1676 in Salzburg, where the 32-year-old composer had relatively recently established himself as one of the leading musicians at the court of the Prince-Archbishop. One can well imagine them making a strong impression; these 12 ensemble sonatas in five, seven or eight parts 'fit for table or altar' (ie for sacred or secular use) are boisterous and confident, grafting free-flying solo writing for violins and/or trumpets on to a solidly grounded core of up to three violas and bass. The sonatas range from five to seven minutes in length and are in the single-movement but multi-sectional style of the *stylus phantasticus*, a manner in which Biber was not only a master but also a personality bursting with vivid and surprising ideas. Anyone familiar with his violin sonatas will smile with recognition at his extrovert bursts of fancy, battlefield cameos, dance-rhythm episodes and distinctive cadences. Add to that the polyphonic probings, rhetorical dialogues and chases made possible by the ensemble texture, and Biber's livewire presence begins to feel very close indeed.

This is very much home ground for Ars Antiqua Austria and violinist-director Gunar

Letzbor, who launch themselves into the music with enthusiasm. Their string sound courses with intensity and bold projection to a degree that, while managing to maintain transparency, springiness and a certain quickness of thought, runs the risk of becoming overbearing in its rarely relenting ebullience. Compared to this, their most recent competitors, the Rare Fruits Council, are smoother, more luxurious and also likely to ease off more in the tenderer passages, while further back the Purcell Quartet are more refined and loving still. You don't have to listen to all the sonatas at once, of course, though in truth even on repeated listenings the sheer robust joy and commitment of Ars Antiqua's performances are hard to resist.

Lindsay Kemp

Selected comparisons:

Rare Fruits Council (4/99) (NAIV) E8630

Purcell Qt (6/96) (CHAN) CHAN0591

Brahms • Schumann

Brahms Cello Sonatas – No 1, Op 38; No 2, Op 99

Schumann Fantasiestücke, Op 73

Bruno Philippe *vc* **Tanguy de Willencourt** *pf*

Evidence © EVCD012 (65' • DDD)



Jacqueline du Pré was only 23 when she recorded her heady account of the Brahms

cello sonatas. But this new recording trumps that, for Bruno Philippe was just 21 and his pianist, the sonorously named Tanguy de Williencourt, only a couple of years older. Both studied at the Paris Conservatoire and they offer playing of splendidly assured maturity and insight, the two artists finding the requisite serenity for the closing moments of the E minor Sonata's opening movement.

From the off, Philippe's approach compels you to listen, to embark on the journey with him, even if the overly close recording catches every breath and every bow sound. True, there are times when I wanted a bit more freedom: in the First Sonata's inner movement and the *Adagio affettuoso* of the Second, Isserlis and Fournier (in his old Decca recording with Backhaus) find more flexibility and a greater degree of reactivity with their pianists (as does du Pré in the latter, though at a famously slow pace); but Philippe makes a particularly soulful sound in the treble register, and the climax of the *Adagio*, with its fervent *pizzicato*, is conveyed with great immediacy. The third movement is unashamedly romantic, while there's plenty of imaginative story-telling in the finale.

I found the Schumann just a degree less convincing. Isserlis finds more light and shade in the second of the *Fantasiestücke* and an almost miraculous elasticity in the third, though again Philippe's intrinsic tone is alluring and Williencourt imbues Schumann's rhythms with a springy buoyancy. It will be intriguing to hear what these two considerable talents do next. **Harriet Smith**

Brahms – selected comparisons:

Du Pré, Barenboim (12/68⁸) (EMI) 586233-2

Isserlis, Hough (1/06) (HYPE) CDA67529

Schumann – selected comparison:

Isserlis, Várjon (5/09) (HYPE) CDA67661

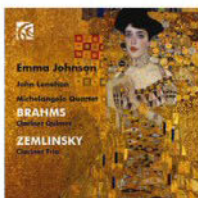
Brahms • Zemlinsky

Brahms Clarinet Quintet^a Zemlinsky Trio, Op 3^b

Emma Johnson *cl*^b **Frans Helmerson** *vc*

^b **John Lenehan** *cl* **Michelangelo Quartet**

Nimbus Alliance Ⓢ NI6310 (67' • DDD)



The Brahms Quintet treats the clarinet as a member of a five-part ensemble rather than

as a lone voice set apart from the string quartet. In this finely balanced performance one is particularly conscious of this; Emma Johnson, when her part is a subsidiary one, blends in easily with the strings, adding a liquid tone to the texture. This is not to say

that she doesn't strongly project and characterise the more soloistic episodes, but the whole account is notable for its feeling of intimate discourse. It's a performance, too, with a fine sense of momentum, a feeling for the longer paragraphs and for each phrase's place in the whole scheme. In this respect it contrasts with the recent recording by Andreas Ottensamer and a quartet led by Leonidas Kavakos, which has a rather more extravagant style and concentrates more on bringing out each expressive detail. For instance, listeners may find the suggestion of wildness that Ottensamer brings to the Hungarian episode in the *Adagio* more compelling, but to me the way Johnson and her colleagues impart a sense of flow extending through the whole movement is equally convincing, as is the way the finale's variations join to make an extended narrative.

Zemlinsky's early Trio, from the period he was in contact with Brahms, takes from the older composer an ability to build up an organic structure. He's perhaps not as adept at deploying each instrument effectively; an elaborate, densely packed piano part tends to deprive the other players, especially the cello, of breathing space. Nonetheless, it's a fascinating, enthralling work, persuasively presented in this strong, confident performance. **Duncan Druce**

Brahms – selected comparison:

Ottensamer et al (6/15) (DG) 481 1409GH

Grieg • Sibelius

'Malinconia'

Grieg Cello Sonata, Op 36. Peer Gynt – Three Pieces. Allegretto. Intermezzo. Letzter Frühling, Op 34 No 2 Sibelius Malinconia, Op 20. Valse triste, Op 44 No 1

David Geringas *vc* **Ian Fountain** *pf*

Profil Ⓢ PH15005 (67' • DDD)



a muscular and forthright impression in the Grieg Sonata, close to the directness of his former teacher in a live 1964 Aldeburgh partnership with Sviatoslav Richter (only available on YouTube now but needed back on disc). Such an approach resituates the work in the mainstream European (that is to say German) tradition but pays less attention to the softer colours and humour (the use of the *Halling*) that are surely the basis of Grieg's palette here, even in more anguished moments. The result is to make the work less individual by oversteering form at the expense of

content. Additionally, the balance between cello and piano, not greatly helped by the German studio recording, is competitive rather than blending.

Geringas is closer to the idiom of the two Sibelius pieces, the cello part of *Malinconia* sounding more than usual like an offcut from one of the symphonies. He revels in its difficulties and coldness more than his pianist. In the shorter Griegs both men give more complete pictures of the music than in the Sonata, although the cellist's suggestive *rubato* makes Anitra a better dancer than his partner's portrait of her does. The Allegretto transcription of the Op 45 Violin Sonata goes especially well and Geringas nicely points the sorrow in his own transcription of 'Solweig's Song'. (Profil should remind their note-writer that *Peer Gynt*'s 'Morning Mood' is a picture of Saharan, not Nordic nature.)

There have been now three new recordings of the Grieg Sonata in the last three months, two of them with accompanying cuadrilla of the lesser cello pieces. This is certainly another handy round-up of that music but the performances, although technically fluent, lack the last degree of identification with the composer's colours and style found, for example, in the Brantelid/Hadland BIS collection reviewed last May. **Mike Ashman**

Hahn

Le bal de Béatrice d'Este^a. Concerto provençale^b. Sérénade^c. Divertissement pour une fête de nuit^a

^b **Julien Vern** *fl*^b **François Lemoine** *cl*^b **Frank Sibold**

bn^b **Julien Desplanque** *hn*^c **Ensemble Initium;**

^{ab} **Orchestre des Pays de Savoie / Nicholas Chalvin**
Timpani Ⓢ 1C1231 (70' • DDD)



Reynaldo Hahn is best known for his songs, his operettas and his relationship with

Marcel Proust: the two were lovers between 1894 and 1896, remaining close friends after their separation; 'Everything I have ever done has always been thanks to Reynaldo,' Proust wrote, which is quite a statement. This collaboration between Ensemble Initium and the Orchestre des Pays de Savoie adds considerably to our understanding of both the man and his achievement with a group of works for wind ensemble and orchestra, composed between 1905 and 1944.

It might seem clichéd to say that Hahn, like his one-time lover, was in search of lost time, but his music, which has genuine charm, is at once retro and timeless. Few of

the modernist developments of the 20th century seemingly impinged upon his style, which owes much to Massenet (his teacher) and something to Duparc, though the taut, closely woven *Sérénade*, written during his wartime exile in Monaco, nods in the direction of neo-classical astringency.

Elsewhere, though, a playful fondness for allusion and formal experimentation is very much in evidence. The *Divertissement* – strikingly scored for wind, piano and string quartet – and *Le bal de Béatrice d'Este* evoke the atmosphere and music of Vienna and Renaissance Italy respectively. *Concerto provençale* places the structure of a Baroque concerto grosso at the service of an über-Romantic depiction of trees in the south of France. The performances are all wonderfully idiomatic. The Concerto's slow movement is breathtakingly done, though the farandole finale could do with a bit more spark. Balance, however, is sometimes a problem, with the Concerto's soloists too far forward and the *Divertissement's* string quartet, formed by the Savoie orchestra's section leaders, sounding distant. But it's a fine achievement overall, sensuous and elegant in equal measure. Very enjoyable. **Tim Ashley**

Handel

Seven Trio Sonatas, Op 5 HWV396-402

Al Ayre Español / Eduardo López Banzo *hpd*
Challenge Classics © CC72663 (77' • DDD)



John Walsh published Handel's Op 5 Trio Sonatas in 1739 but

Challenge's booklet-note insinuates naively that the composer himself had full responsibility for all of the collection's musical content. Although a few sonatas contain movements that seem to be original new compositions, it seems likely that the majority was cobbled together by Walsh without substantial alteration from *Chandos Anthems*, overtures from oratorios and dance music from Handel's Covent Garden operas.

Al Ayre Español never shirk from the chance to exaggerate – even when it undermines good work they do elsewhere. The slow pastoral passages of the *Musette* in No 2 are played ideally with soft rapture, but the middle section is ruined by far too much acceleration and abrasive bowing; fiddlers Alexis Aguado and Kepa Arteché de la Fuente bring a light touch to the concluding *Gavotte*, so it is a pity that harpsichordist and director Eduardo López Banzo seems determined to push the tempo as quickly as humanly possible. The

Sarabande in No 3 hardly benefits from exaggerated accentuations, and I am unconvinced by the wilful *staccato* manner of the bass-line and waspish brevity of violin phrasing in the opening *Andante* of No 1. The *Allegro non presto* in No 4 has an amiable mischievousness but the choppy, formulaic manner adopted in the *Passacaille* prohibits its usually innate charm. Fussy plucked continuo realisations by Banzo and Francisco Aguiló Matas (archlute) propel boldly caricatured performances that will not suit everyone's taste. If you prefer judicious finesse and stylistic integrity to be maintained throughout all kinds of different movements and musical moods, then look no further than the London Handel Players (Somm), The Brook Street Band (Avie) or L'Ecole d'Orphée (CRD). With such a distinguished discography, maybe there is room for Al Ayre Español's mercurial alternative, which is never boring but seldom endearing. **David Vickers**

Selected comparisons:

Brook Street Band (3/06) (AVIE) AV2068

London Handel Phyls (3/06) (SOMM) SOMM044

Ecole d'Orphée (CRD) CRD3377

Karg-Elert

'Wagner Operas for Harmonium and Piano'

Excerpts from *Der fliegende Holländer*,

Götterdämmerung, *Lohengrin*, *Die*

Meistersinger von Nürnberg, *Parsifal*,

Tannhäuser, *Tristan und Isolde* and *Die Walküre*

Jan Hennig *harmonium* Ernst Breidenbach *pf*

Pan Classics © PC10335 (70' • DDD)



Here are 12 more or less self-contained extracts from Wagner's operas arranged for

harmonium and piano duet by Sigfrid Karg-Elert (1877-1933). And played not on any old harmonium such as you might encounter in a run-down Victorian chapel but an 18-stop 1928 Victor Mustel Kunstharmonium (art-harmonium). There are 30 of these Karg-Elert Wagner transcriptions for harmonium and piano (plus 40 for organ and a further 40 for harmonium alone). One hopes the fee was a good one and wonders what the sales figures were. Astonishingly, so Pan Classics' informative booklet reveals, the original commission was for Karg-Elert to adapt all (!) of Wagner's operas for harmonium solo, harmonium and piano duo and other harmonium ensembles (eventually, it seems, both Karg-Elert and his publishers agreed that this was probably not a good idea).

By any standard, then, this is a repertoire curiosity and unlikely to be a best-seller; but

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any cynicism is soon dispelled, first by the sensitive, accomplished musicianship of Jan Hennig and Ernst Breidenbach, and secondly because the two instruments blend together so surprisingly well. It is a combination that works best when sustained tones are called for, such as the Preludes to *Lobengrin* and *Tristan*, the latter using the harmonium's gorgeous *harpe éolienne* stop and a decided success compared to the few piano solo transcriptions that have been made of it. To accommodate the Chorus of the Flower Maidens from *Parsifal* and the Funeral March from *Götterdämmerung*, Karg-Elert offers his own endings; Siegfried's Death is abridged.

What does not work as well are those numbers when the top line is taken by the louder harmonium reeds (Spinning Chorus from *The Flying Dutchman* and Bridal Chorus from *Lobengrin*), giving the unintended impression of Wagner played by a French accordionist who might at any moment burst into 'Under the bridges of Paris'. Hennig and Breidenbach are a seasoned, empathetic duo and their performances have been meticulously prepared. Furthermore, they have been very well recorded.

Jeremy Nicholas

Mendelssohn • JS Bach

Mendelssohn Piano Trios – No 1, Op 49; No 2, Op 66 **JS Bach** Chorale Preludes – Ich ruf' zu dir, Herr Jesu Christ, BWV639; Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland, BWV659

Trio Dali

Zig-Zag Territoires © ZYT364 (60' • DDD)

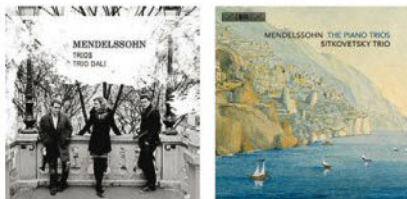
Mendelssohn

Mendelssohn Piano Trios –

No 1, Op 49; No 2, Op 66

Sitkovetsky Trio

BIS © BIS2109 (57' • DDD)



What a pleasure to have not one but two recordings of the Mendelssohn piano trios plunk on to my doormat. The Trio Dali offer a bonus in the form of two Bach chorale arrangements, for violin and cello respectively, sensitively played, with minimum vibrato.

Both sets of players are alive to the unease of the opening movement of the D minor Trio, with some particularly refulgent duetting between Alexander Sitkovetsky and Leonard Elsenbroich (4'01"), compared to which the string players of the Dali are a

touch more held back. Few, though, can rival Heifetz and Piatigorsky in this regard. In the *Andante*, which is such a minefield if taken too slowly, both pianists set up a good tempo, with an apt balance between eloquence and simplicity, though later on it's Elsenbroich's tone which is the more alluring. But sample the Fischer/Müller-Schott/Gilad line-up and you find an even greater intensity at the climax. If no one quite rivals Argerich and the Capuçon brothers for sheer pizzazz in the *scherzo*, the Sitkovetsky nevertheless set off at a tremendous pace, though perhaps they don't quite convey the insouciant élan of Fischer et al. In the finale, it's the Sitkovetsky whom I prefer, the Dali seeming a touch desiccated sound-wise (though this is not helped by the recording, which is less immediate than BIS's for the Sitkovetsky Trio).

Again, comparing the two groups in the C minor Trio, what's striking is the less flattering recording of the Dali. If neither quite matches the Fischer reading in transparency of piano figuration or dramatic use of dynamics in the first movement, it's the Sitkovetsky who are the more persuasive of the two new versions. They're a touch broader in the hymnic slow movement, though I like the Dali's simplicity of approach; this is a movement that prompts widely diverging views, Fischer opting for a tempo so slow that it would seem sepulchral were it not for the intensity of the playing, compared to which Heifetz et al positively zip through it. Again, the Sitkovetsky are a shade faster than the Dali in the *scherzo*, though both dispatch it with great spirit, and they are also particularly compelling in the finale, with a palpable sense of elation at the switch to the major in the closing minutes. So, two fine new recordings, though the Sitkovetsky are a degree more telling, and better recorded. **Harriet Smith**

Piano Trios – selected comparisons:

Heifetz, Piatigorsky, Rubinstein, Pennario (11/52^R) (RCA) 88725 45145-2

Fischer, Müller-Schott, Gilad

(10/06) (PENT) PTC5186 085

Piano Trio No 1 – selected comparison:

R & G Capuçon, Argerich (8/03) (EMI) 557504-2

Mozart

Flute Quartets – No 1, K285; No 2, K285a;

No 3, K285b; No 4, K298

Juliette Hurel fl **Voce Quartet**

Alpha 18th Century © ALPHA204 (58' • DDD)



'Three small, easy and brief concertinos and a couple of quartets for the flute' is how

Mozart described the commission from Ferdinand Dejean. The pieces were K285 and K285a; K285b and K298 were written separately. The authorship of K285b has been questioned, and for Henrik Wiese, editor of the Henle Edition, Mozart in K298 'makes use of various themes by minor contemporary composers cobbling them into a parodistic quartet'.

Juliette Hurel is an excellent flautist, warm and clean of tone, but a musician whose insight is often circumscribed by emotional reticence. The strings tend to follow her lead, and a jointly impersonal view of K285 sets the ball rolling. Bland playing glosses over the modulation to A minor in the development of the first movement and although the rhythm of the finale is good, the dynamic range is narrow. Most affected is the B minor *Adagio*. Hurel & Co are a touch prosaic, leaving Emanuel Pahud to reveal the poetry of this profound slow movement. Interpretative constraints similar to those in K285 are heard in other quartets too, the exception being K 285b. It's a shining exception, of artists stepping out of templates, taking personal responsibility to go beyond the notes to find the moods, colour and potency inherent in the music – which Michala Petri (recorders) does in all four works.

Nalen Anthoni

Selected comparisons:

Pahud (11/99) (EMI) 556829-2

Petri (11/08) (OUR) 6 220570

Pärt

'Complete Works for Violin and Piano and for Piano Solo'

Diagramme. Fratres^a. Für Alina. Für Anna Maria (two versions). Partita. Passacaglia^a. Sonatinas – No 1; No 2. Spiegel im Spiegel^a. Ukuaaru valss. Variations for the Healing of Arinushka. Vier leichte Tanzstücke

^a**Ursula Schoch** vn **Marcel Worms** pf

Zefir © ZEF9641 (63' • DDD)



A number of previous recordings of Arvo Pärt's piano music have been released, including Ralph van Raat (Naxos, 12/11), Katarina Ström-Harg (FP Music) and Jeroen van Veen (Brilliant, 3/14). The latter's survey of the composer's complete solo piano music extends to two discs, which begs the question: how can Pärt's entire output for solo piano and violin be fitted on to one disc?

With a good few minutes to spare, if you happen to be violinist Ursula Schoch and pianist Marcel Worms. Clocking in at just

over an hour, Pärt's music is presented at its most pragmatic and prosaic here. Schoch and Worms don't hang around. Seemingly incapable of playing slowly, Worms reels off Pärt's music with almost carefree abandon. His unfussy approach works to an extent in the early neo-classical pieces – as heard in the two Sonatinas and *Vier leichte Tanzstücke* – or when shaping the edgy pointillistic lines of the atonal *Diagramme*.

It becomes more problematic when we get to Pärt's mature works, however. Worms's overenthusiastic tempo-centricity obliterates the delicate beauty of *Variationen zur Gesundheit von Arinuschka*, and the well-known *Fratres* for violin and piano is also given a rather uneven treatment. Pärt integrates groups of seven, nine and 11 into the compositional design of this piece with steadfast rigour and regularity, yet on this recording the bar lengths are constantly clipped and elided. Daniel Hope's performance on 'Spheres' (DG, 5/13) is far more convincing.

Spiegel im Spiegel is judged much better but even here Worms's tempo inexorably accelerates before being pulled back by Schoch's far steadier violin. The two are on firmer ground with the regular pulse and projection of the Passacaglia for violin and piano, which rounds off the disc, but the precious space between the notes – that key element in Pärt's music – is, for the most part, missing. **Pwyll Ap Siôn**


C Simpson

'Ayres & Graces'

Twenty Ayres for Two Trebles and Two Basses.
Four Divisions

Chelys Consort of Viols with

Dan Tidhar chbr.org/hpd **James Akers** theo/gtr

BIS (F)  BIS2153 (60' • DDD)



What a treat it is to hear forgotten chamber music by the English viol player

Christopher Simpson, whose four-part *Ayres* were recently discovered in manuscript partbooks dating from the 1640s in the Bodleian Library. The *Ayres* comprise 20 'aires' and dances (grouped in suites by key) for pairs of treble and bass viols, to which the Chelys Consort of Viols have added continuo instrumentation, as would have been appropriate. The *Graces* charmingly refer to the four sets of Divisions: two for two bass viols and two for treble and bass.

Chelys pace the *Ayres* beautifully (the galliards are lilting, the aires tuneful) and ornament the repeats. The viols tend to play as pairs (trebles and basses), though

one bass often joins in with the trebles in its tenor range. Absolute clarity is sometimes slightly confounded by the choice of continuo instrument(s): the use of chamber organ enhances blend and resonance but tends to obscure the bass parts whereas the harpsichord and theorbo add welcome ictus, especially to the dance movements; the Baroque guitar brings an exotic timbre to the A minor Divisions (tr 9) and D major Sarabande (24), paired on each occasion with a different keyboard instrument.

Woven into the 'Ayres & Graces' are dialogues and antiphony, countermelodies, cascading sequences, chromaticism and hemiolas, to which Chelys and their colleagues Dan Tidhar and James Akers artfully draw our attention, at the same time referencing the light and shade of Simpson's personal motto, 'Neque lux sine urba'.

Julie-Anne Sadie

Telemann

Concertos - TWV42/a7; TWV43:C2. Sonatas - TWV42/a7; TWV42/c6; TWV42/F5; TWV42/g7; TWV42/g15; TWV42/h4

Bassorilievi

Deutsche Harmonia Mundi (F) 88875 06992-2 (77' • DDD)



Who would have thought, even just a few years ago, that we would be seeing a CD

whose purpose is to offer the complete Telemann sonatas for flute, viola da gamba and continuo? Well here they are, six of them, apparently composed for musicians at the Darmstadt court, who included gamba virtuoso Ernst Christian Hesse among their number. Together with two chamber concertos for those same instruments plus bassoon, the result is 75 minutes of Telemann at his most skilfully affable and seriously polite; no jokey character pieces and few signs of Polish folk influence here.

Bassorilievi, from Italy are surely right to emphasise the predominantly 'dolce and cantabile affects' characteristic of their two principal instruments, favouring a rich and warmly balanced sound over one of brightly separated colours. The bassoon, for instance, used sometimes on the bass-line in the sonatas, is kept well under control, and indeed combines with gamba so well in the B minor Concerto that it almost sounds like a gently squeezed accordion. They are most effective in the *Adagio* that opens the B minor Concerto, mysterious, probing and pulsing.

Elsewhere, however, they are apt to let the music get a little sleepy, even to drag its feet occasionally, as in the *Largo* of the C major Concerto or the lumpy gigue of the F major Sonata. The opening *Siciliana* of the G minor Sonata, while hardly tragic material, should probably have at least some kind of sense of longing. Thus, for all the tonal and dynamic refinement of the playing here, as well as the unobtrusively subtle varying of a continuo section that also involves theorbo, cello, violone and harpsichord, we must hope for a greater spark of energy and excitement next time.

Lindsay Kemp

'L'arte dei piffari'

'Cornetts and Sackbuts in Early Baroque Italy'

Anonymous El bisson e sua gagliarda **Bassano**

O doctor optime **Casa** Jubilate Deo **A Gabrieli** Maria stabat ad monumentum **G Gabrieli** Domine exaudi **Gussago** Sonata undecima 'La Marina' **Magini** Sinfonia prima **Malvezzi** Coppia gentile.

Sinfonia quarta **Marenzio** Chi dal Delfino **M Neri** Sonata a sei **Palestrina** Ave Maria **Perti** Stella ista sicut flamina **Rore** Calami sonum ferentes **S Rossi** Gagliarda. Sinfonia **Vecchi** Balletto

Ensemble Ventosum

Pan Classics (F) PC10332 (63' • DDD)



This anthology constructs a narrative through Italian music ranging across more

than a century, from about 1580 to 1700, and most of the pieces are transcriptions taken from short sacred polyphony originally written for voices. There are not many composers who securely fit the billing as 'Early Baroque', and the majority are renowned late Renaissance (Palestrina, Cipriano de Rore, Marenzio, Vecchi and both Gabrielis), but the early-18th-century *stile antico* is represented by a Roman six-part sinfonia by Francesco Magini (dated 1710) and the four-part motet *Stella ista sicut flamina* by Giacomo Antonio Perti (1661-1756).

A revolving team of three cornettists (all of whom switch between different instruments, including the smaller and higher-pitched cornettini), four trombonists and continuo organist give priority to contrapuntal shading, but without loss of naturally accumulating grandeur in Marenzio's six-part madrigal *Chi dal Delfino* (one of several pieces here taken from the intermedio *La Pellegrina*, for the wedding of Ferdinando de' Medici and Christine of Lorraine in 1589). The distinct texture of four trombones produces a darker-hued solemnity in Cipriano de Rore's secular motet *Calami*

sonum ferentes and one of Palestrina's umpteen settings of *Ave Maria* (performed in a version from a 1591 treatise by Giovanni Bassano that features solo diminutions for one of the trombones). Cornettist William Dongois plays diminutions with florid virtuosity and fantasy in Giovanni Gabrieli's six-part *Domine exaudi* (from the posthumous 1615 collection *Symphoniae sacrae*); his soloing accompanied only by organ will startle those familiar with the original six-voice version of Andrea Gabrieli's motet *Maria stabat ad monumentum* (which commenced the Gabrieli Consort's iconic liturgical reconstruction of a Venetian Easter Mass – Archiv, 7/97). Ensemble Ventosum's polyphonic conversance ensures that powerful textures and grandeur are insinuated without needing to blaringly force the issue, and these expertly played interpretations are manna from heaven for those who adore Renaissance brass consorts.

David Vickers

'Carte blanche'

Bartók Violin Sonata No 1, Sz75^a

Beethoven Piano Trio No 5, 'Ghost', Op 70 No 1^b

Lutosławski Variations on a Theme of Paganini^c

Montero Improvisation on 'Happy Birthday'^d

Ravel Ma Mère l'Oye^e **Schubert** Grand Rondeau, D951^e. Arpeggione Sonata, D821^f **Schumann** Kinderszenen, Op 15^g

^{abcefg} **Martha Argerich** *pf* with ^a **Renaud Capuçon**,

^b **Julian Rachlin** *vns* ^f **Yuri Bashmet** *va* ^b **Mischa**

Maisky *vc* ^e **Lang Lang**, ^{cd} **Gabriela Montero** *pfs*

DG (M) ② 479 5096GH2 (138' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Verbier Festival, July 27, 2007



The Verbier Festival gave Martha Argerich carte blanche to invite her best friends to

perform with her for one night only in 2007, and this, eight years later, is the souvenir double album, as DG begins to open up its Argerich/Verbier archive. The acoustic isn't as generous as EMI/Warner achieve in Lugano and there is a good helping of audience noise (especially damaging at the outset of 'Träumerei'). Only Schubert's *Grande Rondeau* appears to be new to the Argerich discography. But what a night it must have been!

Argerich, Rachlin and Maisky tear into Beethoven's *Ghost* Trio for the sort of performance you'd revisit again and again. Renaud Capuçon abandons his usual sweetness of tone for something altogether more abrasive in Bartók's First Violin Sonata, even if not quite matching the laser-like focus of Kremer in this music. (There's only one Gidon Kremer, though,

just as there's only one Renaud Capuçon.) Yuri Bashmet might have demanded a couple of retakes in the Arpeggione Sonata had this been a studio session. And ensemble comes apart just ever so slightly as Argerich accompanies Lang Lang in the Schubert piano-duo rondo. Lang Lang, however, performs better in a scintillating *Mother Goose* suite. And there's the added treat of a rare solo outing for the lady herself in Schumann's *Kinderszenen*, played with her characteristic improvisatory élan.

There are so many good things to hear here, all given the extra frisson of live performance, that it's hard to pick a favourite, although mention must be made of Lutosławski's *Paganini* Variations, with Gabriela Montero on first piano. Montero also supplies the encore – an improvisation on 'Happy Birthday' for Lily Maisky, in which the scrappy little tune is treated to variations à la mazurka, tango and all manner of other dances. It brings the house down. What a night indeed! **David Threasher**

'The Cello in Spain'

Anonymous Adagio (Barcelona MS)

Boccherini Cello Sonata, G6. Guitar Quintet,

G448 – Fandango **Duport** Cello Sonata

Paganelli Cello Sonata **Porretti** Cello Concerto

Supriano Toccata prima **Vidal** Duetto-Andante

Zayas Última lección

La Ritirata / **Josetxu Obregón** *vc*

Glossa (P) GCD923103 (57' • DDD)



Josetxu Obregón's imaginative recording of music written for the cello under

Spanish influence – usually in Spain but not necessarily by Spanish composers – brings together not only a rich collection of lesser-known pieces but gives them a context that shows the extent to which the itinerant composers writing them were affected by the mystique of Spain and its charisma. That may be a familiar practice when addressing court music in Italy, Germany or England but is new and colourfully different when beholding Spain.

There has been a recent and pleasing resurgence – or perhaps first-time apprehension – of Boccherini as an important figure in the performance, as well as composition, of cello music, and his presence as central character on this disc is further testament to his quiet influence. He settled in Spain, unlike many of his peripatetic Italian colleagues, and it was there that his individuality asserted itself. It was risky, though:

inasmuch as many musical dignitaries made an impression there (such as Farinelli and Domenico Scarlatti), it was equally the musical graveyard of the careers of many Italians who might have enjoyed greater success had they completed their grand tour of Europe by returning home. As such, the history of the cello in Spain in that period is still tantalisingly indistinct: is what is hidden there as accomplished as the majority of Boccherini's output or is it music that lies stagnant for good reason?

Obregón is a powerful promoter of repertoire (much of it enjoying its first recording here) that floats between the Baroque and the Classical, both chronologically and in terms of style, through the idiomatic and imaginative use of instruments (including castanets for the Fandango from Boccherini's Guitar Quintet). This not only lifts the music of a first generation of native cellist-composers such as Pablo Vidal and Domingo Porretti into something that engages the brain as well as soul, but creates a sun-drenched sound world that could be nothing other than Spanish in its spiritedness and joviality.

Caroline Gill

'Harmonische Freude'

JS Bach Jesu, meine Freude, BWV713a. Trio

Sonata No 3, BWV527 **Homilius** Chorale Prelude,

Nun freut euch, lieben Christen gmein. Oboe

Sonata **Kauffmann** Chorale Preludes – Ach Gott,

vom Himmel sieh darein; Gelobet seist du, Jesu

Christ; Wie schön leuchtet der Morgenstern

Krebs Fantasias – on Wachet auf; in G minor.

Praeambulum supra Jesu, meine Freude.

Chorale Preludes – Jesu, meine Freude (two

versions); Nun freut euch, lieben Christen gmein

Tag Chorale Prelude, Nun danket alle Gott

Austral Harmony

Chandos Chaconne (P) CHAN0809 (64' • DDD)



Austral Harmony – a trio of two Australians and a Brit – invite listeners to experience

a carefully imagined, rather enchanting soundscape of mid-18th-century Lutheran Leipzig. Two themes inform this recording: the joyfulness of the chorale texts, and the genius and influence of JS Bach. We're treated to four settings of *Jesu, meine Freude* by Bach and one of his star pupils, Johann Ludwig Krebs, as well as a newly discovered Sonata for oboe and continuo by another pupil, Gottfried August Homilius. Homilius's pupil Christian Gotthilf Tag makes a cameo appearance with a chorale prelude for oboe and organ, and Georg Friedrich



Lang Lang is just one of the musicians to join Martha Argerich on new two-CD set of performances from the Verbier Festival

Kauffmann, Bach's competitor for the Leipzig Kapellmeister post, enjoys the last word.

Why then is the recording 'carefully imagined'? Many of the tracks were arranged by Peter Hagen, who took his cues from period practices, substituting an oboe in the top line of the organ part in a number of works originally either for organ alone (the Bach organ trio) or with one obbligato instrument (that in the chorale preludes took the tune), which here is allocated to a trumpet. Jane Downer playing in turn two oboes and Simon Desbruslais four trumpets further enrich the soundscape.

Kauffmann was the first to suggest substituting an oboe on the top line in his organ preludes (*Harmonische Seelenlust*, 1733-36); Krebs specifically composed for organ and one obbligato instrument (oboe, trumpet or trombone). By involving both oboe and trumpet in works originally for two instruments, Austral Harmony have in effect created a new, niche chamber repertoire, an extremely attractive one at that. Some instruments work better together than others and the oboe occasionally overpowers the organ. Nevertheless, beautifully, joyously performed, this is a thought-provoking disc I look forward to revisiting and sharing with friends. **Julie Anne Sadie**

'Romantic Metamorphoses'

Bloch Suite **Vieuxtemps** Viola Sonata, Op 36

Waxman Carmen Fantasy **E Zemtsov** Melodie im Alten Stil

Dana Zemtsov vs **Cathelijne Noorland** pf

Channel Classics (P)  CCSSA37215

(72' • DDD/DSD)



In some respects, this is a very personal disc. It aims, we are told,

to explore the 'many and often subtle definitions' of the word 'romantic' as expressed in music for viola and piano. So the Sonata by Vieuxtemps, one of the iconic performer-composers of the Romantic movement, is placed alongside works born of a romantic fascination with Asia and Spain by Bloch and Bizet respectively. At its centre, however, is a family love story: Dana Zemtsov's grandfather, Russian composer Evgeni Zemtsov, wrote *Melodie im alten Stil* to woo her grandmother, also a viola player.

Bloch's travelogue, tracing an evolutionary parabola from 'primitive' jungle life to imperial China, is the great work here. We know it better in its revised

version as the Suite for viola and orchestra, though the original, with its striking piano-writing, all swaying Impressionist chords and pointillistic flourishes, is exceptionally beautiful. Bloch gives equal weight to both players, and Zemtsov's understated virtuosity is admirably balanced by the detailed refinement of Cathelijne Noorland's pianism.

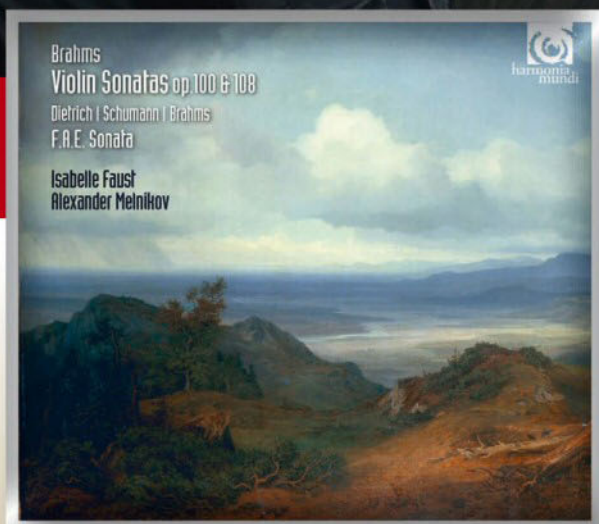
Vieuxtemps and Evgeni Zemtsov, meanwhile, adopt a conventional view of the viola as melancholic, most famously embodied, perhaps, in Berlioz's *Harold en Italie*. Written after a stroke cut short his career as a violin virtuoso, Vieuxtemps's Sonata looks back nostalgically to Schumann, who much admired him in his heyday. *Melodie in alten Stil* is a lyrical vocalise, timeless and elegant, rather than rooted in pastiche. Zemtsov plays both with beguiling warmth. *Melodie* gives Noorland little to do, though Vieuxtemps presents her with piano-writing at once difficult and ungrateful, which she tackles with considerable finesse. The Bizet-Waxman *Carmen Fantasy* comes in a transcription by Mihail Kugel that doesn't really work. It shows off Zemtsov's formidable technique to perfection, though the piano reduction makes it sound curiously trite. **Tim Ashley**

Isabelle Faust Alexander Melnikov

BRAHMS Violin Sonatas no.2 op.100 & no.3 op.108 / F.A.E. Sonata
SCHUMANN Three Romances op.94



Photo © Melina Visuals for harmonia mundi



CD HMC 902219

Concerts

Berg Concerto, SCO, Ticciati ; Edinburgh 8/10/15; Glasgow 9/10/15
Schumann Concerto, RLPO, Petrenko, Liverpool 12/11/15 & 13/11/15

A 19th-century 'trio sonata'

Isabelle Faust and Alexander Melnikov have already given us an acclaimed version of Brahms's First Violin Sonata, in 2007. They now complete the cycle with the other two sonatas of 1886 and 1888, and add a fascinating rarity dating from 35 years earlier: the 'F-A-E' Sonata, a collaborative effort by three composers in honour of the great violinist Joachim, who had to guess who had written which movement! He did so with ease, for the Scherzo is as eminently Brahmsian as the Intermezzo and Finale are Schumannesque.

'With her consistently beautiful tone and dead-centre intonation, Isabelle Faust matches her closest rivals...in panache, and arguably surpasses them in spontaneous imagination.'

Richard Wigmore, The Daily Telegraph

'Isabelle Faust and Alexander Melnikov [perform] with intelligence, intensity, lithe flexibility, and a sense of partnership and mutual understanding that's utterly persuasive.'

Andrew McGregor, CD Review

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GRAMOPHONE *Collector*

RADICAL TONALITY

Philip Clark sifts through a selection of discs of piano-based works that seek out a new relationship with traditional musical languages



Mary Dullea who has recorded Eric Craven's Piano Sonatas on Métier

Six releases arrive on my desk, all dealing in what, for argument's sake, I'm going to term 'radical tonality'. All this music works directly with, or alludes to, or actively searches for common triads and chord sequences. But these composers reactivate tonality while ditching the cushioning tonal grammar, often replacing it with syntax of their own invention. Christian Wolff and Morton Feldman are elder statesmen, composers who made Christopher Fox, Michael Finnissy and Eric Craven think hard about the direction of their own work, and the rationale behind including the pioneering British improvisation group AMM's new *Place sub v* is straightforward enough. The Another Timbre release of Feldman works for small ensemble and multiple pianos features pianists Philip Thomas, Mark Knoop and Catherine Laws – and also John Tilbury, an agitator for the Feldman cause since the late 1960s. Sub Rosa's three-CD Wolff set is also performed by Thomas; and almost since AMM was founded in 1965, Wolff has floated in and out of the ensemble as a semi-permanent member. And AMM's pianist? John Tilbury, take a bow.

These personal connections mean more, I think, than mere coincidences of personnel. The evolution of post-war music, we are persistently told, has been etched around ideological clashes between tonality and atonality, but these discs prove that assumption to be a lame simplification

– the rearguard action of composers foraging around in the harmonic fault lines has been important too.

Tides washing faraway tonal debris ashore. The surface lushness of **Eric Craven's** harmonic language is offset by the discreet volatility of his structures. Composer and pianist are photographed bent down on the floor surrounded by the loose-leaf pages of Craven's score. The challenge: to divine an overarching structural logic from out of those free-floating modules. Rhythm and pitch are given. And the rest is up, not so much for grabs, but for allowing ears scope to zone inside the evolving tonal tapestry, fingers intuiting where best to lay the next panel. **Michael Finnissy's** pieces jam material and structure together into a comparably dissonant alliance, albeit arrived at via different compositional strategies. Craven's hall of mirrors is hallucinogenic; Finnissy shatters the glass.







'Mississippi Hornpipes' severs the arteries of tonality, American folk-fiddle themes collaged, a process Finnissy equates to William Burroughs's literary cut-up technique. His Violin Sonata is a more intentionally composed realisation of that same principle that riffs off the structural inner workings of Brahms's String Quintet, Op 88, the momentum of discontinuity rubbing against what Finnissy terms 'a set of ongoing variations'. The Craven and Finnissy pieces operate within a framework where the existence of tonality is explicitly

acknowledged, but AMM (John Tilbury and percussionist Eddie Prevost) and Fox's *L'ascenseur* build structural impetus from their search for a workable tonality.

Comparing the opening gambits of **Christopher Fox** with **AMM** is instructive. Prevost uses his tam-tam to sculpt shapes from out of the harmonic series as Tilbury shadows his moves. The Fox piece opens with a roaring, rolling stratified cluster that will acquire rhythmic hiccups; clashing mechanisms from which a brainworm melodic itch is gradually foregrounded. A major triad bursts out of AMM's machinations after a whole 30 minutes like an internet pop-up page, heralding the moment when Tilbury and Prevost's hard-fought-for tonality can quiver with the excitement of discovery.

Morton Feldman's music was never less than fastidiously notated but his notational access led, paradoxically, to sounds that register as being spontaneously cooked and liberated from dogmatic systems. The performers on Another Timbre, centred around Thomas, Tilbury, cellist Anton Lukoszevics and violinist Mira Benjamin, deliver noticeably austere Feldman: no need for his sounds to go anywhere in particular and certainly no need for reverby ambience. The **Christian Wolff** works trace splashes of tonal colour that aspire to find their form – or rather we want them to find a form but Wolff's systems prove ultimately too difficult to crack. Seemingly prosaic sequences are manhandled into impossibly convoluted and disorientating structures – tonality returned to a mysterious, unknowable state. **G**

THE RECORDINGS

- | | |
|---|--|
|  | Craven Piano Sonatas Nos 7-9
Mary Dullea <i>pf</i>
Métier Ⓢ MSV28544 |
|  | Finnissy 'Mississippi Hornpipes'
Darrah Morgan <i>vn</i> Mary Dullea <i>pf</i>
Métier Ⓢ MSV28545 |
|  | Fox Works for Piano
Philip Thomas <i>pf</i>
hat[now]ART Ⓢ HATN192 |
|  | AMM Place sub v
John Tilbury <i>pf</i> Eddie Prevost <i>perc</i>
Matchless Ⓢ MRCD91 |
|  | Feldman Two Pianos, etc
Philip Thomas, John Tilbury et al
Another Timbre Ⓢ Ⓢ AT81X2 |
|  | C Wolff Pianist: Pieces
Philip Thomas <i>pf</i>
Sub Rosa Ⓢ Ⓢ Ⓢ SR389 |

Itzhak Perlman

As the violinist prepares to celebrate his 70th birthday, Tully Potter champions the artistry of this master musician who overcame disability to dominate both the stage and the studio

In the last quarter of the 20th century, Itzhak Perlman was in a class of his own as a violinist, hailed by critics, audiences and his peers. Since the turn of this century, he has slightly withdrawn from the travelling virtuoso life – particularly stressful for a disabled artist – and has diversified into conducting, teaching and his role as a genial elder statesman. But as he turns 70, he remains a massive presence.

Born to Polish immigrant parents on August 31, 1945, in Tel Aviv, Palestine, about the time the state of Israel emerged in 1948 he became aware of music on the radio. Too small for even a quarter-sized violin, Itzhak consoled himself with a toy fiddle. An attack of polio lost him the use of his legs when he was four but thanks to a close family, he retained his sunny temperament. Few things arouse the ire of this good-humoured man, but one of them is the plight of the disabled.

Under Rivka Goldgart's tutelage at Shulamit Conservatory he prospered: 'She was a great Russian traditionalist and she told me I had to do what Heifetz did – scales every day.' Regular concert appearances began: he played seated and his pianist or conductor carried his violin and bow on to the stage while he used crutches. In 1958 he was taken to America for a TV show. In five years at the preparatory division of Juilliard School in New York, Ivan Galamian – pupil of Lucien Capet, guru of modern bowing – and Dorothy DeLay changed his bowing from the Russian to the Franco-Belgian style. Perlman stayed with DeLay at senior Juilliard, made his Carnegie Hall debut in 1963 with Wieniawski's First Concerto and won the 1964 Leventritt Competition. In 1965 he toured Israel, in 1966 he taped his first recordings for RCA, in 1967 he wed the

vivacious Toby Friedlander – and his London debut came the following year.

Perlman met Vladimir Ashkenazy at the 1967 summer festival in Daytona Beach, Florida, where they and Barry Tuckwell were acclaimed in Brahms's Horn Trio. Fifteen months later, they recorded it for Decca, following Prokofiev sonatas for RCA. Later, cellist Lynn Harrell joined them in a trio. With Pinchas Zukerman, Perlman formed a violin duo. He has made music with pianists Martha Argerich and Bruno Canino, and now has a trio with Emanuel Ax and Yo-Yo Ma.

As the previous great names – Heifetz, Milstein, Oistrakh, Kogan, Grumiaux, Stern, Menuhin – dwindled or died, by the mid-1970s Perlman was on a lonely pinnacle of eminence: he had a broader, deeper repertoire than any of them, reaching back to Vivaldi, forward to Shostakovich, and was more reliable musicologically. Tonally refulgent, his playing was founded on a limitless technique, true intonation, subtle rhythm, the broadest of phrasing.

Itzhak Perlman has made myriad records for RCA, Decca, EMI, DG and Sony Classical, taking in jazz, Jewish music, film soundtracks, even the jailer's role in *Tosca* – he is an excellent bass. 'When I record, I like to do a take right at the beginning, just to hear what I'm really doing, to find out whether what I think is coming out is really coming out. Frequently there are interesting surprises.'

He plays Russian music better than the Franco-Belgians, Franco-Belgian music better than the Russians. You will not hear finer Tchaikovsky or Glazunov on the one hand, or Saint-Saëns, Chausson, Lalo or Franck on the other. His Bach is full-toned, using

DEFINING MOMENTS

•1949 – *Music offers a lifeline to the young Itzhak*

Four-year-old Itzhak is struck down by polio and left without the use of his legs. His recovery is helped by playing an eighth-sized violin.

•1958 – *Early fame thanks to a prime-television appearance*

Taken to America for the first of several appearances on the coast-to-coast *Ed Sullivan Show*. 'I played the last movement of the Mendelssohn Concerto and *Flight of the Bumble Bee*.' Subsequently chosen for a two-month 'Caravan of Stars' tour visiting 20 North American cities.

•1964 – *A major award acknowledges his talent*

Wins the Leventritt Competition, which brings valuable engagements across America and the sponsorship and friendship of the influential Isaac Stern.

•1966 – *His debut on disc in two 20th-century concertos*

Makes his first recordings, the Sibelius Concerto and Prokofiev Second, on December 21 with the Boston Symphony under Erich Leinsdorf for RCA. A year later they record the Tchaikovsky Concerto.

•1995 – *Passing on his experience to a younger generation*

Founds the Perlman Music Program with his wife Toby. Originally a summer camp for encouraging young musicians, it now runs all the year round. Perlman also teaches at Juilliard.

THE ESSENTIAL RECORDING



Beethoven Violin Concerto. Romances
Itzhak Perlman vln

Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra /
Daniel Barenboim

EMI/Warner Classics (M) 749567-2 (11/89)
Recorded at the Philharmonie, Berlin,
November 1986



the resources of a post-Tourte bow and a modern-set-up violin, but stylish and involving; likewise his Mozart – sonatas with Barenboim, concertos with Levine, *Sinfonia concertante* with Zukerman and Mehta.

‘Mozart and Haydn would have loved to have heard a “blood-and-guts” kind of performance of their music,’

Perlman says. ‘There are letters of Mozart in which he says that he wanted more warmth and “real stuff”.’ His Paganini, Wieniawski and Sarasate stand up to any scrutiny. He has the big personality for the 19th-century concertos and is one of a precious few to play the Beethoven and Brahms equally well.

From the moderns we have magnificent accounts of Berg, Bartók, Stravinsky, Barber, both Prokofievs and the First

Shostakovich. Perlman’s Sibelius glows, his Elgar is sumptuously phrased. His preference for being balanced quite forward in concertos has drawn criticism but he says:

‘I want to be heard in a concerto – it’s not chamber music, after all’ – Itzhak Perlman

‘I want the violin to be heard.

It’s not chamber music, after all.’

Although EMI has trumpeted the Beethoven and Brahms with Giulini, both are undermined

by the conductor’s over-insistence on *legato*. The live versions with Barenboim are infinitely better, the Beethoven surely the greatest concerto by the outstanding violinist of his era. **G** Perlman’s complete Warner recordings are reviewed in *Reissues* by Rob Cowan next issue; the complete DG recordings were reviewed in August. A recital disc with Emanuel Ax on DG is due out on August 28. Perlman’s Barbican birthday concert is on April 5, 2016

Instrumental



Jeremy Nicholas on a new disc of Liszt's Transcendental Etudes:

'József Balog is not only a safe pair of hands but someone who innately understands Liszt's idiom' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 69**



Jed Distler welcomes a novel take on Scarlatti's keyboard sonatas:

'It's gratifying to have followed Huangci's progression from a 16-year-old prodigy to an artist poised for greatness' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 71**

JS Bach • Glass

JS Bach Fantasia, BWV572. Passacaglia, BWV582. Pastorale, BWV590. Preludes and Fugues – BWV532; BWV541; 'St Anne', BWV552. Toccata and Fugue, BWV565 **Glass** Dances – No 2; No 4. Mad Rush. Music in Contrary Motion. Satyagraha – Finale

Iveta Apkalna *org*

Oehms © ② OC1827 (160' • DDD)

Played on the Klais organ of Himmerod Abbey



This generously filled two-disc set was recorded in 2013 on the mighty Klais

organ (of 1962) in the rebuilt Cistercian abbey at Himmerod in the Rhineland. With its eight-second reverberation time, it presents a tremendous challenge for the player and engineer alike to produce comprehensible recordings.

The Latvian organist Iveta Apkalna (b1976) has chosen eight of Bach's major organ works for the first disc. Her playing is totally assured and faithful to the printed score. The opening Toccata and Fugue in D minor is dispatched dramatically with meaty registrations, including generous use of the Pedal 32ft in the Toccata. The contrasting Pastorale in F is tinted with 'spiky' hues, eschewing the heavier registers. Things progress most satisfactorily with a majestic E flat major Prelude, its so-called *St Anne* Fugue striding slowly down the nave.

Apkalna's account of the C minor Passacaglia is first-rate, with nothing overblown, and she dances through the G major Prelude, though possibly too quickly for this most generous of acoustics. She also misses several possible internal phrasings which a study of Dupré's edition might have usefully clarified.

Happily she has the D major Prelude and Fugue well under control, with some superb *staccato* pedalling. Finally, she rips into the opening of the G major Fantasia, throwing the music high into the acoustic before ploughing through the five-part

texture of the *organo pleno*. Despite one or two moments of unsteadiness in the pulse, this makes a most satisfying conclusion.

Concerns over the blurring effect of such a large space are dispelled with the five pieces by Philip Glass. Here, Stravinsky's description of the organ as 'the monster that never breathes' could not be more apt. Apkalna's technical control is staggering. Her playing has poise as well as purpose. These 'endless toccatas' simply shimmer, producing a soothing, ethereal élan. She manages to shave off one minute from Glass's own recording of *Mad Rush*, and in Michael Riesman's arrangement of the Conclusion from Glass's opera *Satyagraha* builds up most convincingly two powerful waves. Most satisfying is the Dionysian whirlwind of the Dance No 2 of 1979, the longest piece on the whole album. **Malcolm Riley**

JS Bach

'Cello Suites, Vol 1'

Solo Cello Suites – No 1, BWV1007;

No 3, BWV1009; No 4, BWV1010

Joachim Eijlander *vc*

Navis © NC15003 (65' • DDD)



With works recorded as often as Bach's Cello Suites, it is essential for a

listener, if her interest is to be sparked and maintained, to be able to hear the underlying thesis of a player's performance. It is pleasing, therefore, that Joachim Eijlander's approach is audibly apparent in every bar of his first volume of the Suites: the tempi are measured, if uncontroversial, the performances are meticulous in their tuning. Those features, and the unassuming personality of Eijlander's playing, are the greatest strengths of this disc, and there is also more grace to the dance here than is often to be found in modern recordings. The sound is not as apparently effortless as on David Watkin's superlative *Gramophone* Award-nominated performance of earlier

this year (Resonus, 6/15), but that is not to say that Eijlander's voice is lost in a less characterful account (and solo pieces like these naturally have more license for individual interpretation than accompanied music).

There is considerable delicacy here, too, which, for the far greater part, brings out the multifarious layers of the music and will keep it fresh on repeated listening. Occasionally, though, there are points where his lightness of touch limits the performance slightly. That lightness, or rather the civility of his playing, can lead to him glossing over the endless, bewilderingly unpredictable sequences at the beginning of the Third Suite. There are, however, no such limitations in the beautifully painful acclamation of the open, resonating G string throughout the middle section of that Prelude. That really needs to be there in any performance such as this, which aims to (and does) stir the soul as much as it honours Bach's perfect musical mathematics. **Caroline Gill**

Beethoven

Piano Sonatas – No 2, Op 2 No 2;

No 5, Op 10 No 1; No 24, Op 78; No 31, Op 110

Angela Hewitt *pf*

Hyperion © CDA68086 (76' • DDD)



As with previous instalments in Angela Hewitt's near-

complete Beethoven cycle, this fifth volume, for the most part, offers interpretations characterised by intelligent virtuosity and cultivated artistry. No detail in Op 2 No 2's *Allegro vivace* transpires unnoticed. The broken octaves and rapid up-beat flourishes couldn't be clearer, although the movement's brash undercurrents best reveal themselves when Hewitt points up the development section's witty motivic repartee. Her elegantly unfolding *Scherzo* and *grazioso* Rondo movements (the latter contains just a hint of the 'traditional' swan-dive most pianists



Bassoonist Pascal Gallois recording his new Stradivarius disc featuring solo works by Berio, Boulez and Neuwirth

impose upon the opening measure's three high E naturals) splits the difference between Pollini's stylish understatement and Kovacevich's genial inflections. The *Largo appassionato* stands out for Hewitt's superb clarification of Beethoven's part-writing and her ability to differentiate the composer's *tenuto* and *staccato* markings while consistently maintaining a full-bodied sonority with little help from the sustain pedal – obviously her long experience with Bach is an asset here!

Similar qualities distinguish Hewitt's eloquently sustained Op 10 No 1 *Adagio molto*, while her astute (if ever-so-slightly studied) observance of the first movement's sharp dynamic contrasts and rarely heeded rests illuminates the music's intense profile. As much as I admire pianists who grab on to the finale's *Prestissimo* directive and run away with it (Glenn Gould, for example), Hewitt's relatively reined-in yet resolutely steady pace allows for shapely fast scales and dynamic shading of the repeated notes. In the little Op 78, Hewitt doesn't quite catch fire in the opening movement, mainly because she tends to telegraph the *subito pianos* with small pauses, while the *Allegro vivace* ambles rather than sprints, and the fast major/minor shifts lack a sense of surprise.

Happily, everything comes together for Hewitt in a most inspired Op 110. It abounds with long-lined breadth, careful dynamic scaling, assiduously worked-out tempo relationships and heartfelt poetry. In particular, the finale's fugal textures convey uncommon vocal distinction and a sense of air between the notes (thanks, again, to Hewitt's Bachian expertise). I'd go so far as to say that Hewitt's Op 110 alone is worth the price of this disc, and easily takes its place alongside great versions by Hess, Arrau, Petri, Hungerford and a curiously underrated EMI release with Awadagin Pratt. **Jed Distler**

Berio • Boulez • Neuwirth

'Solo'

Berio Sequenza XII **Boulez** Dialogue de l'ombre double **Neuwirth** Torsion
Pascal Gallois *bn*
Stradivarius © STR37020 (51' • DDD)



Few bassoonists could hope to match Pascal Gallois when it comes to his extending of an all too limited repertoire. The present disc brings together three pieces which he has

inspired and championed, opening with *Torsion* (2005), in which Olga Neuwirth pits the instrument against a CD of 'events' that are variously antagonistic and provocative – resulting in a heightened monologue no less intense or imagistic than in her numerous stage- or mixed-media works.

The other works are by contemporaries whose electro-acoustic experiments often proceeded in parallel. Although conceived for clarinet, Boulez's *Dialogue de l'ombre double* (1995) can be heard in several transcriptions – witness Erik Bosgraaf's virtuoso reimagining for recorder (7/15) – and Gallois does not disappoint with a reading that underlines the music's ritualistic fervour and its symmetrical poise, abetted by sensitive handling of the electronic component. Whereas Boulez is suggestive, Berio is playful – though playfulness in the latter's *Sequenza XII* (1995) assumes any number of possibilities for expanding and, finally, transforming the bassoon's essential character. Nor does one of the longest among this seminal instrumental series risk outstaying its welcome when the performance is attentive to its chimerical range of moods, with Gallois bringing out a capriciousness more than equal to its technical resource.

The sound has a spaciousness and focus such as presents these highly distinct works to best advantage, while the booklet-notes are informative without being technical. At 51 minutes there was room for another piece, but if this presages a follow-up from Gallois, so much the better.

Richard Whitehouse

Chopin

'Chopin Now'

Four Ballades. Barcarolle, Op 60. Two

Nocturnes, Op 62. Polonaise-fantaisie, Op 61

Håkon Austbø *pf*

Simax Ⓢ PSC1347 (68' • DDD)



'Chopin Now' is the title of this new disc from the Norwegian pianist Håkon Austbø,

a concept explored and explained in the thought-provoking booklet essay, the gist of which is that Chopin is as relevant today as he has ever been. Austbø couples the Four Ballades with late pieces and, throughout, he's keen to emphasise the rhapsodic, in-the-moment quality of the music. This works well in the innocent opening of the Second Ballade; the Third, too, begins with a certain freedom, though here both Perahia and Zimerman are effective for their greater initial reserve, the repeated A flat octave sounding more brazen in Austbø's hands. What concerned me more, though, is that in places he sounds effortful – his *Polonaise-fantaisie* never truly takes wing – and his filigree is less silken than some (just sample from 5'16" of the First Ballade). Turn to the teenage Argerich, caught by Berlin Radio in 1959 (DG, 7/10), and you hear what's missing.

The Fourth Ballade begins better, though Austbø is not as dreamy as Anderszewski; but as the temperature hots up, the textures feel dense rather than airborne. And as a whole it lacks the sense of inevitability that Fliter and Zimerman find. While the Barcarolle is spot-on in terms of tempo, Austbø's weighting of Chopin's chords could have had more finesse.

And in the two Op 62 Nocturnes, Austbø doesn't come close to Pires's unerring sense of narrative in the first. In the second, one of the most elliptical of all Chopin's works, Hough illuminates its minimalist lines with a complete naturalness that the Norwegian can't quite emulate.

Harriet Smith

Nocturnes, Op 62 – selected comparisons:

Pires (10/96) (DG) 447 096-2GH2,

477 7583GGP or 477 9568GM2

Hough (5/15) (HYPE) CDA67764

Four Ballades – selected comparisons:

Zimerman (10/88) (DG) 423 090-2GH

Perahia (12/94⁸, 3/11) (SONY) 88697 64823-2

Ballade No 4 – selected comparisons:

Anderszewski (12/03⁸) (VIRG) 686370-2

Fliter (EMI) 514899-2

Chopin

Complete Waltzes.

Nocturnes – No 1, Op 9 No 1; No 9, Op 32 No 1;

No 11, Op 37 No 1; No 20, Op *posth*

Louis Lortie *pf*

Chandos Ⓢ CHAN10852 (82' • DDD)



Louis Lortie's earlier recordings in his Chopin series have received mixed reviews

in these pages, ranging from enthusiastic (BM and me) to unconvinced (HS). This fourth volume finds me split down the middle. The running order is odd. Though the idea seems to be to present all the Waltzes in chronological order of composition starting with the earliest (posthumously published), the two Waltzes of Op 69 are separated by 11 tracks, while the sequence of the three Waltzes of Op 64 is broken by the insertion of a couple of Nocturnes left over from previous sessions, which are, moreover, much more satisfactorily recorded. Curiously, at least two of the works presented here (the Waltzes in E flat, B46, and A minor, B150) are, by the booklet's own admission, now generally accepted as not by Chopin.

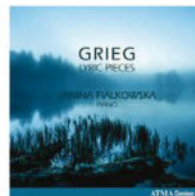
The sound and the piano bother me. The combination of Potton Hall and a Steinway nearly always achieves a well-nigh perfect balance and atmosphere; Potton Hall, a Fazioli and a microphone placement favouring the resonant bass makes the listener a distant, uninvolved spectator. Lortie, that most eloquent and tasteful of pianists, sounds often uncharacteristically heavy-handed – the last thing you want in Chopin. Of course there are many things to admire – the exquisite *rubato* in Op 69 No 1, the chattering middle section of Op 18 and the insouciant playfulness in the little posthumous A flat Waltz are among a string of delightful successes – but overall I'm afraid this collection doesn't compete with Stephen Hough (Hyperion, 10/11) and Ingrid Fliter (EMI, 12/09), to name but two recent surveys. **Jeremy Nicholas**

Grieg

Lyric Pieces: Op 12 – No 1, Arietta; No 5, Popular Melody; Op 38 – No 1, Berceuse; No 7, Waltz; No 8, Canon; Op 43 – No 1, Butterfly; No 4, Little Bird; Op 47 – No 2, Album Leaf; No 3, Melody; No 4, Norwegian Dance; Op 54 – No 3, March of the Trolls; No 4, Notturmo; Op 57 – No 2, Gade; Op 62 – No 1, Sylph; No 4, Brooklet; No 6, Homeward; Op 65 – No 4, Salon; No 6, Wedding Day at Trolldhaugen; Op 68 – No 3, At Your Feet; No 4, Evening in the Mountains; No 5, At the Cradle; Op 71 – No 1, Once Upon a Time; No 2, Summer's Eve; No 3, Puck; No 7, Remembrances

Janina Fialkowska *pf*

ATMA Classique Ⓢ ACD2 2696 (67' • DDD)



Coming hard on the heels of Stephen Hough's selection from all 10 books of

the *Lyric Pieces* (Hyperion, 6/15) is another by Janina Fialkowska – who, too, has a temperament and style ideally suited to these miniature tone-poems. Between Hough's 27 numbers and Fialkowska's 25, there are 18 duplications. Both include all the 'hits' – with the exception of Fialkowska's omission of 'To Spring' – but it would make tedious reading to list all the other titles the discs do not share.

Of the two, it is Hough who is more successful in capturing the full expressive and dynamic range of these pieces. Let me cite four examples. Hough (at 1'09") allows the opening 'Arietta', surely one of the loveliest single-page works ever penned, to speak for itself whereas Fialkowska (1'22") wants to tell you how lovely it is. 'Butterfly' benefits from Hough's slightly slower, more light-fingered fluttering while, conversely, Fialkowska's 'March of the Trolls' (marked *allegro moderato*) is not enough *allegro* and too much *moderato* (3'37"), putting me in mind of Snow White's companions on their way to work; Hough's brisker pace (3'00") makes them into a horrible (in the original sense of the word) little band. Finally, in the opening four bars of 'Notturmo', arguably the finest of all 66 *Lyric Pieces*, Fialkowska plays the 9/8 left-hand triplets in strict tempo, which makes the music sound like a measured waltz; Hough, with greater imagination, plays them with the subtlety of *rubatos* – to magical effect.

This, admittedly, is nit-picking over minor details and none of this should deter you from hearing Fialkowska's disc, especially in such heart-easing, wistful numbers as 'Melody' (Book 4), 'At the Cradle' (9), 'Summer's Eve' and 'Remembrances' (10). Beautifully recorded and with an excellent booklet. **Jeremy Nicholas**



'A temperament and style ideally suited to these miniature tone-poems': pianist Janina Fialkowska, who has recorded a selection of Grieg's Lyric Pieces for ATMA

Haydn · D Scarlatti

'Chiaro e scuro'

Haydn Piano Sonatas – No 13, HobXVI/6; No 38, HobXVI/23; No 39, HobXVI/24; No 50, HobXVI/37. Divertimento, HobXIV/10

D Scarlatti Keyboard Sonatas – Kk128; Kk342; Kk425; Kk432; Kk495

Olivier Cavé *pf*

Aeon © AECD1545 (80' • DDD)



This is a thoroughly satisfying essay on the possibilities of a connection between

the keyboard works of Joseph Haydn and Domenico Scarlatti. Geographically, and chronologically, the possibility that Scarlatti influenced Haydn seems at first remote. Haydn was born in 1732 and by 1733 Scarlatti was installed in Madrid, music master to Princess Maria Barbara. But while the bulk of Scarlatti's sonatas were not published at the time, some of them certainly travelled and were widely admired, and in a cogent booklet essay, Elaine Sisman argues for multiple vectors whereby the binary-form works of the Italian master may have made their way under the nose of the young Austrian composer: through the poet and librettist

Metastasio, the composer and singing teacher Porpora and the celebrated castrato Farinelli, among others, including lesser-known musical savants who circulated throughout Europe and had contact with Haydn in Vienna.

Even sceptics, however, will be convinced by Olivier Cavé's compelling musical demonstration of harmonic, textural, inventive and temperamental affinities between the two musicians. Sudden changes to the minor key, striking contrasts in the thickness of sonority, irregular phrases and periodicity, and a shared indulgence of pure eccentricity recur throughout the works of both composers, who are each represented by five works (three sonatas, a partita and divertimento by Haydn, and five sonatas by Scarlatti). Cavé's touch and sensibility tend to elide differences between the two composers, while his crisp, sensible and unfussy ornamentation immediately distinguishes the Scarlatti works (grounded in the harpsichord) from the latter, more plastically expressive Haydn.

Cavé's readings are fluent and natural, and even when tempi are fast (as in the Haydn sonatas in D major, HobXVI/37, and F major, HobXVI/23, and the Scarlatti Sonata in G major, Kk432) they are never frantic. Passagework, ornamentation and

fleet accompaniment figures flow with ease, dispatched with clarity and liquid tone. Delights abound: the brief but subtle flirtation with imitative figures in the Scarlatti Sonata in E major, Kk495; the pathos of the *Adagio* from the Haydn F major Sonata; the uncharacteristically lush tone the pianist adopts for the final work on the disc, the early Scarlatti Sonata in B flat major, Kk128.

If Haydn absorbed anything from a possible encounter with the music of Scarlatti, it was likely a sense of permission, the freedom to indulge ideas with spontaneity and a quicksilver turn of mind. And even if one doubts any connection at all, Cavé's sparkling performance argues for a kinship of spirits that transcends influence or contact. **Philip Kennicott**

Liszt

Etudes d'exécution transcendante, S139

József Balog *pf*

Hungaroton © HCD32736 (68' • DDD)



Liszt's 12 *Etudes d'exécution transcendante* in their final 1852 form place huge technical and musical demands on the player. Few are



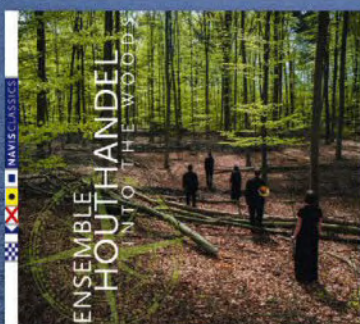
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those who attempt to play the entire set at a sitting, though a recent performance by Kirill Gerstein in London's Wigmore Hall proved that some are willing and capable of rising to the challenge (in Gerstein's case with thrilling results and, apparently, without breaking sweat).

József Balog (b1979, Budapest) makes a good fist of the *Etudes* (no pun intended), though I think he falls short of the finest versions available. Among these are Lazar Berman's 1959 mono recording followed closely by his 1963 stereo remake (Melodiya, 8/95), Vladimir Ovchinnikov (EMI, 9/89, 8/95), Boris Berezovsky (Apex, 3/97) and the white-hot Georges Cziffra (EMI, 1957/58).

Right from the outset, with the artfully phrased and voiced declamatory 'Preludio', one can relax in the knowledge that Balog is not only a safe pair of hands but someone who innately understands Liszt's idiom. His respect for the score is exemplary – when Liszt asks for *ppp* it is played as such and not an approximation – and all directions are followed to the letter (listen to his delicate response to *quasi timpani* in the second subject of 'Wilde Jagd'). In concept, Balog is closer to his teacher Jenő Jandó (Naxos, 11/97) and László Simon (BIS), whose fine account was appropriated by the late Joyce Hatto as part of her infamous swindle. All three choose tempi that are generally broader than the benchmarks, depriving some études of their moments of high drama (the famous *disperato* instruction in No 11, for instance). Balog's 'Ricordanza' is a casualty, over-extended at 11'06" compared to, say, Ovchinnikov's 9'15" or Berezovsky's 9'25". On the other hand, one of the most appealing aspects of Balog's approach is his refusal to indulge in histrionics. He has good fingers and is not afraid of letting the bass roar when necessary. In short, these performances are remarkably good and far from studio-bound while lacking that last edge of spine-tingling magic. **Jeremy Nicholas**

Ravel

Gaspard de la nuit. Miroirs.

Pavane pour une infante défunte

Carlo Grante *pf*

Music & Arts (M) CD1289 (58' • DDD)



Carlo Grante, the Italian pianist who has recorded the Chopin-Godowsky *Etudes* and, remarkably, the complete Scarlatti sonatas, enters a crowded marketplace with his Ravel recital. *Miroirs* has been

memorably recorded by Richter and Thibaudet, the *Pavane pour une infante défunte* by Gilels (his live 1969 Carnegie Hall recital) and *Gaspard de la nuit* by Pogorelich (a poignant reminder of early brilliance), Thibaudet, Argerich, Michelangeli, and with Mark-André Hamelin on the horizon. And so I turned with interest to see what special insights Grante has to offer. The answer comes disconcertingly early. Why so loud and unobtrusive in 'Noctuelles' (*Miroirs*) when it is marked *pianissimo*? How odd, too, to find Grante referring in his notes to the 'elegant, melancholy arabesques' of 'Oiseaux tristes' when his playing is curt and unevocative. In 'Une barque sur l'océan' – that incomparable marinescape – the manner is again testy and violent, while 'Alborada del gracioso' is too heavy-handed to be scintillating.

When it comes to *Gaspard de la nuit*, 'Ondine' is loud when it is marked *ppp*: an Ondine who shouts rather than whispers her seductive entreaty. In 'Le gibet' the pulse is unsteady rather than relentless, while 'Scarbo' gives this pianist a hard time and is strenuous rather than effortless (a tall but necessary order). On this showing, the French repertoire is unsuited to Grante.

Bryce Morrison

D Scarlatti

Keyboard Sonatas – Kk4; Kk6; Kk8; Kk13; Kk29; Kk31; Kk32; Kk35; Kk61; Kk76; Kk108; Kk124; Kk125; Kk135; Kk140; Kk144; Kk146; Kk175; Kk206; Kk208; Kk213; Kk260; Kk278; Kk284; Kk296; Kk322; Kk397; Kk427; Kk443; Kk450; Kk454; Kk470; Kk476; Kk490; Kk491; Kk518; Kk513; *Kkdeest* in G minor

Claire Huangci *pf*

Berlin Classics (M) ② 0300603BC (131' • DDD)



Pianist Claire Huangci has devised an ingenious programme concept for her second solo CD release, a two-disc Scarlatti collection. She divides disc 1's sonatas into three groups and constructs each group into a plausible Baroque suite. The sonatas within each group not only share a common tonal centre but also correspond, more or less, to the mood and character of typical suite movements (preludes, allemandes, sarabandes, gigue and so on). Similarly, she models disc 2's groupings after classical sonatas in regard to tonal relationships and the typical fast-slow-fast three-movement paradigm (trs 13-16 add up to a convincing four movement entity). I'm not sure where the final C major Sonata, Kk513, fits into

IN THE STUDIO

An inside view of who's before the mics and what they're recording

• Winning Warner pianists

French pianist **Alexandre Tharaud** has taken his interpretation of Bach's *Goldberg Variations* into the studio. The recording, made in Aix-en-Provence in June, is due for release on Warner Classics next month.

Piotr Anderszewski, meanwhile, has been in front of the microphones to make a new album of varied repertoire for the label, due for release to coincide with the pianist's 25th-anniversary concert at Wigmore Hall in February. And the award-winning Italian pianist **Beatrice Rana** (pictured) has recorded two concertos – Prokofiev's Second and Tchaikovsky's First – in Rome, accompanied by Pappano and his Orchestra dell'Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia. The recording, the first fruit of the pianist's new exclusive Warner contract, is due for release in November.



• Variations on a theme

Another pianist has taken the *Goldbergs* into the studio. **Igor Levit** recorded his take on the piece in the Grosser Sendesaal of Berlin's Funkhaus on Nalepastrasse in early August. Bach's work will make up the third panel in the triptych of sets of variations that will form the pianist's next album for Sony Classical. The other works, previously recorded, are if anything even more imposing and technically demanding, and will no doubt have pianophiles salivating: Frederic Rzewski's *The People United Will Never Be Defeated!* and Beethoven's *Diabelli Variations*. The set is due for release in late October.

• Goerner records Chopin

Argentinian pianist Nelson Goerner has recorded a Chopin recital album for Alpha, due to include the Op 28 Preludes, Berceuse, Barcarolle and Polonaise Op 44. Made at the Penderecki Centre for Music in Zakliczyn, Poland in mid-August, the recording is scheduled for release in December.

Huangci's scheme of things, yet the music can certainly stand by itself by virtue of its pastoral demeanour and intrinsic tempo changes. One particularly effective juxtaposition occurs in disc two's first hybrid 'sonata', where the main theme of Kk206 in E major, in steady rhythm, dovetails into the opening three notes of Kk322 in A major without blinking an eye. Huangci's ordering also illuminates elements in Scarlatti's music that point to the future, such as the lovely right-hand cantilena of Kk208 in A major, which one could plug into a Mozart sonata without anyone being the wiser.

In order for Huangci to maintain balance and proportion within her superimposed larger forms, she understandably omits repeats, which avid Scarlatti connoisseurs might miss. Yet when you consider her instinctive musicality, unflappable technical command and sensitive ear for nuance, repeats hardly matter. Listen to the astonishing fluidity and centredness of her rapid scales in Kk124, the hypnotic aura she creates and sustains within Kk125's unusually slow tempo, the insightfully contoured canonic lines of Kk76 in G minor or Kk397's alluringly blended detached and *legato* articulations; this is Scarlatti artistry of the highest order.

Granted, one might prefer aspects of other performances to Huangci's, but she more than holds her own in the company of celebrated Scarlatti luminaries; her disarming way with Kk284 in G major, for example, equals Pletnev for character. It's gratifying to have followed Huangci's progression from a 16-year-old prodigy to a 25-year-old artist poised for greatness.

Jed Distler

Scelsi

Suites - No 8, 'Bot Ba'; No 9, 'Ttai'

Steffen Schleiermacher *pf*

Dabringhaus und Grimm © MDG613 1777-2 (68' • DDD)

Scelsi

Suites - No 9, 'Ttai'; No 10, 'Ka'

Sabine Liebner *pf*

Wergo © WER6794-2 (60' • DDD)



Composers are often painfully aware of how much longer it can take to write down musical thoughts than it does to invent or perform them. With the three works on these discs, Giacinto Scelsi didn't simply

improvise and record extended passages and transcribe them himself, but left an assistant with the challenging task of putting pen to paper. Both discs have extended booklet essays explaining how Scelsi's improvisations became compositions to be played by other people, and how this process relates to non-Western religious and philosophical beliefs. Suite No 8 (1952) is called *Bot Ba*, suggesting Tibetan religious rituals; No 9 (1953) is *Ttai*, which identifies a symbol in the Chinese *Book of Changes* representing peace; and No 10 (1954) is *Ka*, a Sanskrit word for 'who?' or 'what?', implying that the music embodies a quest for something – or someone – essential.

The sheer strangeness of all this has made Scelsi a name to conjure with among many avant-garde composers in the years since 1945. His music is very hit-and-miss but at its best – a category represented here by Suite No 8 – it transcends strangeness in a kind of visionary wildness that balances urgency against depth with remarkable success. Steffen Schleiermacher's account of this 30-minute epic is compelling in its controlled intensity. Suite No 10, which has some of No 8's power while being more loosely organised in places, is no less convincingly put across (especially its Nancarrow-like finale) by Sabine Liebner. The Wergo recording is less refined acoustically than MDG's for Schleiermacher, but some listeners could well prefer Liebner's more detached approach in music that has so many deceptive associations with the piano repertory from Liszt and Ravel to Bartók and beyond.

Both discs include the 35-minute Suite No 9, and it is here that my own problems with Scelsi's music arise. Both annotators quote the composer's injunction that 'this suite should be listened to and played with the greatest inner calm. Nervous people stay away!' But I'm tempted to suggest that music seeking to capture the essence of peace and 'inner calm' cannot be dreamily improvised: it needs concentrated, self-critical thought. There are a few brief moments in these nine movements to remind you of the less peaceful, more persuasive Scelsi of Suites Nos 8 and 10. But, even with the dedicated advocacy of Liebner and Schleiermacher, I cannot feel that regular listening to this work is something I will be making time for.

Arnold Whittall

Schumann

Album für die Jugend, Op 68

Vladimir Feltsman *pf*

Nimbus Alliance © NI6307 (76' • DDD)



Schumann's *Album für die Jugend* was composed for his young daughters, and,

scaling down his volatile, complex and Romantic nature, the composer produced music of a beguiling simplicity. Yet even if Op 68 is a festival of innocence, it would not be by Schumann if the odd disquieting figure were not present to haunt the world of childhood magic. Light is, from time to time, qualified by shade, a foreshadowing of adult experience to come.

All this is reflected in Vladimir Feltsman's playing where he, too, scales down his virtuoso command to embrace those elements in Schumann's world with skill and affection. His soldiers ('Soldiers' March') parade with clockwork precision while his 'Poor Orphan' is both plaintive and bright-eyed. 'May, sweet May' could hardly be sweeter and in 'First Loss' there is a true sense of early sadness (the loss of a pet gerbil, perhaps?). 'Gathering of the grapes – happy time', on the other hand, is happy indeed, while in No 30 (untitled) and most of all in 'Mignon' there is a blossoming of Schumann's most quintessential poetry, a quality that has endeared him to every race, and never more so than to the Russians.

For Feltsman – as for Moiseiwitsch, Horowitz and Richter – Schumann is at the very heart of the matter. Feltsman writes his own notes declaring his love in every word, though it is odd to find him referring to the *Bunte Blätter* (music which is 'phantasmagorical, fragmented and unsettling') as of 'intermediate difficulty'. Nimbus's presentation is exemplary, though the charming cover picture of a rocking horse seems to have escaped from the earlier *Kinderszenen*.

Bryce Morrison

Smith • Handel

Handel Riccardo Primo, re d'Italia - Overture

JC Smith Six Suites of Lessons for the Harpsichord, Op 3

Julian Perkins *hpd*

Chandos Chaconne © CHAN0807 (77' • DDD)



John Christopher Smith (1712-95) was the son of Handel's long-

serving assistant Johann Christoph Schmidt. By 1725 he was studying composition and harpsichord with

GRAMOPHONE *Collector*

PIANO WORKS OLD AND NEW

Jed Distler listens to four sets which combine staple repertoire with new music that views it through a contemporary prism



Orli Shaham, whose new album for Canary Classics centres around the music of Brahms

Old and new music intermingle throughout these four releases, starting with **Gabriela Montero**, who describes her composition for piano and orchestra *Ex patria* as a response to the repressive policies and dire living conditions in her native Venezuela, and a memorial to each year's increasing number of murder victims. While one can and should appreciate Montero's programmatic intentions, the music is little more than ersatz Bartók and Prokofiev, with a sugar-coated final theme hoisted upon a blustery orchestral framework. The work's main problem is that Montero essentially treats the orchestra as a backdrop, with the piano rarely out of the spotlight. By contrast, Rachmaninov's Second Concerto, the main coupling, defines equal partnership between soloist and ensemble – in fact, the orchestra gets most of the good themes. Montero pounds out the first movement's rolling arpeggios over a diffusely balanced YOA Orchestra of the Americas (who is that amazing horn soloist?). Slight holdbacks at phrase-ends in the *Adagio sostenuto* grow predictable and threaten to dilute Rachmaninov's polyrhythmic linear effect. Montero tends to push ahead in parts of the finale and is mixed too loud for the brilliant *concertante* instrumentation to fully register. Ironically, Montero's three concluding solo improvisations prove more unified, compositionally disciplined and contrapuntally skilful than her notated Op 1 'concerto'.

The daughter of composers Elena Firsova and Dmitri Smirnov, **Alissa Firsova** is a triple-threat pianist/conductor/composer. Her *Lune rouge* is a veritable fountain of trills, birdsong and sunny harmonies spraying in all directions, yet confidently holding together in an impassioned and polished performance. She meets the thorny technical and musical demands of her parents' compositions with equal command. Opting for the original 1913 text of Rachmaninov's Second Sonata, Firsova takes special care to follow his dynamics on faith, with her composer's ear for underlining inner voices and juicy harmonies at full tilt. In the *Corelli Variations*, Firsova keeps Rachmaninov's textures in proper foreground/background perspective, abetted by assiduous tempo relationships and rhythmic vitality, not to mention a technique that knows no limits. In short, Alissa Firsova is the real thing.

Collectors familiar with **Maria Lettberg's** standard-setting Scriabin piano cycle won't be surprised at the tonal variety, multi-level command and supple transparency she brings to Sergey Pavchinsky's potentially overloaded 'de-orchestration' of *The Poem of Ecstasy*. Liszt's *La lugubre gondola* No 2 offers a speedier, less sombre Venetian tour, while the first and last of Messiaen's *Vingt regards sur l'Enfant-Jésus* resonate from the bottom up. Imagine a long, brooding introduction tacked on to Sorabji rewriting Ravel's 'Scarbo' and you more or less have the gist of Harald Banter's Scriabin

homage. Manfred Kelkel memorialised Scriabin with his two-movement *Prélude and Transmutations*, which is essentially 17 wasteful minutes of mutated Scriabin.

Orli Shaham's two-disc collection 'Brahms Inspired' frames Brahms's three last *Klavierstücke* cycles alongside older and newer compositions by other composers, together with Brahms-inspired works by Bruce Adolphe and Avner Dorman. The final 26 minutes intersperse the three movements of Brett Dean's *Hommage à Brahms* between each of Brahms's Op 119 pieces. The sum of the whole adds up to the musical equivalent of an intelligently curated gallery exhibition. There's a fluid and organic progression between works that illuminates and unifies each composer's distinct style. In *My Inner Brahms*, Adolphe carefully guides widely spaced and polyrhythmic dissonant counterpoint towards consonant signposts in a manner that reaches back to the opening piece in Brahms's Op 118. Dorman's cluster-laden rewrite of the same piece forces the issue, so to speak, while Op 119 No 1 provides this composer with a springboard for genuine invention and dramatic build.

The decorative Impressionistic gestures in Dean's *Engelsflügel 2* relate more to Chopin than to the Hamburg master. Shaham's dynamic range and sonority are well displayed in her fervent and committed readings. She emphasises the lyrical qualities of Schoenberg's *Six Little Pieces* while bringing percussive bite to the second piece's obsessive thirds. By contrast, she serves up a full-bodied Chopin Berceuse and a gently contoured and conservatively paced Bach First Partita. Her Brahms-playing is consistently masterful, although I suspect that her heart lies with Op 119, especially in regard to the aching deliberation and internalised intensity she brings to the B minor Intermezzo. Devastating stuff. **G**

THE RECORDINGS



Rachmaninov. Montero Works for Piano and Orchestra **Gabriela Montero** Orchid © ORC100047



Firsova. Rachmaninov 'Russian émigrés' **Alissa Firsova** Vivat © VIVAT109



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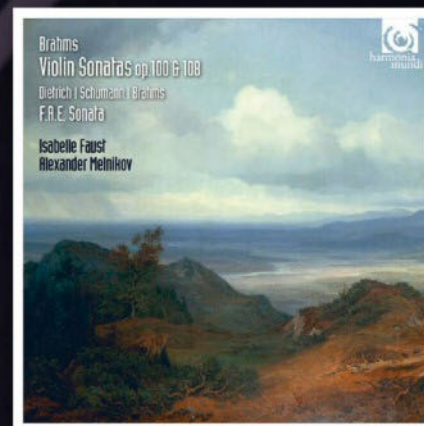
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Handel; from 1751 he served as his mentor's amanuensis, and he eventually succeeded his master as director of oratorio seasons at Covent Garden. He is the only one of Handel's pupils who followed in his teacher's footsteps as a professional keyboard player and composer-performer of theatre works.

His music occupies a strange sort of halfway territory between the late Baroque style and the progressive early Classical mould, and Julian Perkins captures the dichotomy of mid-18th-century England's Scarlattian obsession and the emerging rococo style in his judicious playing of Smith's *Six Suites of Lessons for the Harpsichord*, Op 3 (printed by John Walsh in 1755) – although he prefaces it with Handel's own short harpsichord arrangement of the overture to *Riccardo Primo*.

A single-manual English harpsichord, probably made by Maby and William Bailey (London, c1770) is used in flat-key suites, but for the suites in sharp keys Perkins plays a bigger Franco-Flemish double-manual instrument (each instrument is tuned to a different temperament as well as offering distinctive sonic palettes). The larger instrument is used with delicate refinement when necessary (eg in the *Larghetto* from No 1 in A major), whereas the Gavotte that ends No 4 in D major has crisp theatricality. The 'fruity' sound of the smaller English instrument is to the fore in the concluding *Allegro* in No 2 in C minor, in which more than a splash of Handelian repeated-note rhetoric is developed with tense chromaticism; its lute-stop is reminiscent of a softly lyrical mandolin in the central Allemande in No 3 in F major and the Gavotte that ends No 4 in B flat major. These playful lessons amply repay Perkins's curiosity.

David Vickers

Benno Moiseiwitsch

Beethoven Piano Sonata No 21, 'Waldstein', Op 53^a. Andante favori, WoO57^a. Piano Concerto No 5, 'Emperor', Op 73^b **Chopin** Ballade No 3, Op 47^c **Mussorgsky** Pictures at an Exhibition^d **Rachmaninov** Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini, Op 43^e **Schumann** Kreisleriana, Op 16^d

Benno Moiseiwitsch *pf*

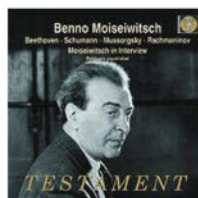
^aBBC Symphony Orchestra / Sir Adrian Boult;

^bStadium Symphony Orchestra of New York / Josef Krips

Testament mono (M) (3) SBT3 1509 (4h • ADD)

Recorded ^a1946, ^ac1958, ^bd1961

Includes 'Moiseiwitsch in Interview': Moiseiwitsch in five interviews in New York and London during the 1950s and '60s



After Naxos's lucky 13 discs of Moiseiwitsch comes a Testament three-

CD album of previously unpublished recordings. Here, once more, you return to the possessor of a stupendous but nonchalantly deployed technique combined with a teasingly elegant, fine-spun musicianship. Moiseiwitsch was understandably held in awe and affection by Rachmaninov, Hofmann, Eileen Joyce, Myra Hess and Bolet. Not that he was without his detractors, Clinton Gray-Fisk mistook his understatement for indifference. Instead, today we remember that outwardly imperturbable and inscrutable manner famously captured by cartoonists (Benno plays *tranquillo* or *agitato* but always with the same expression). There was no outward display; the magic was all in the fingers.

His Beethoven *Waldstein* is fast and cool-headed. His Schumann conveys his special love for the composer in free and improvisatory style, his opening, in particular, a volatile contrast to, say, Géza Anda's shimmering alternative. In Mussorgsky's *Pictures*, as elsewhere, there is a playful tampering with the text. Why not sky the treble an octave higher if you feel like it or reinforce the bass-line? Moiseiwitsch was never a 'correct', spick-and-span pianist. His Beethoven *Emperor* is of an infectious exuberance and in Rachmaninov's *Paganini* Rhapsody you hear all of his feline ease and caprice, notably in Variation 15.

Disc 3 contains no fewer than five interviews, which should have been an added bonus. Alas, for the greater part Moiseiwitsch sounds shy and bemused by many banal and patronising questions. Philip Hope-Wallace and John Freeman's manner, while very much of its time (1959), is unforgivable. Despite this, insights occur: the failure to play Mozart ('I'm not ready'); the sadness over young pianists' addiction to speed and noise (though with a notable exception made for Van Cliburn). Finally, this invaluable album of – for the most part – fine transfers is a reminder of a great artist who, as Josef Hofmann so succinctly put it, was 'a natural pianist in the Romantic tradition'. Bryce Morrison

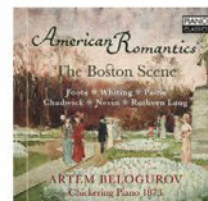
'The Boston Scene'

Chadwick Dans le canot. Barcarolle. Les grenouilles. Humoresque **Foote** Suite No 1, Op 15 **MR Lang** Rhapsody, Op 21 **Nevin** Water

Scenes, Op 13 **Paine** In the Country – Woodnotes; Wayside Flowers; The Shepherd's Lament; Village Dance; The Mill; Welcome Home. Three Piano Pieces, Op 41 – Fuga giocosa **Whiting** Bagatelles

Artem Belogurov *pf*

Piano Classics (M) PCL0080 (70' • DDD)



Here's an area of the piano's repertoire that is not often visited. Nor is it

at all common to hear an 1873 grand by Chickering, the leading American maker of the 19th century (Hans von Bülow used one for the world premiere of Tchaikovsky's First Piano Concerto in Boston). Parallel-strung, it has an attractively mellow tone, though even its recent restoration has been unable to entirely eliminate the 'dumf' of the pedal action.

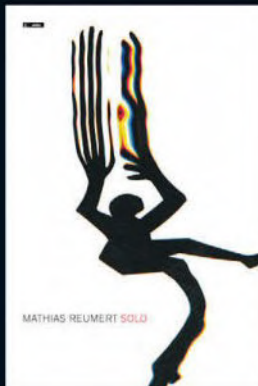
All six of these American composers were members of the Harvard Musical Association (founded 1837 and from whose ranks the original members of the Boston Symphony were drawn). None of them inhabits the summit of Mount Olympus; rather they toil happily in the sunlit foothills somewhere below the peaks of Mendelssohn, Dvořák and, especially, Grieg. I failed to find much evidence, *pace* the very good booklet, of 'the harmonic languages of Brahms and Wagner' in the attractive Rhapsody, the longest work on the disc at 8'44", by the long-lived Margaret Ruthven Lang (1867-1972).

Despite the modest ambition of the 23 separate movements, and while there is nothing too technically taxing for the pianist or demanding for the listener, these are well-crafted, melodic character pieces of instant appeal. Best of all is Arthur Foote's Suite No 1 (1886) in four short movements (Prelude, Fugue, Romance and Capriccio), which might usefully find a place in a recital today. One piece will be familiar to every reader: Ethelbert Nevin's 'Narcissus', No 4 of his *Water Scenes*, Op 13, once de rigueur for all drawing-room pianists. This, however, is the excellent Artem Belogurov's one miss-hit, curiously laboured and lumpy, and entirely lacking the airy grace of Philip Martin (Hyperion, 11/03). Still, it's hard to hear 'Narcissus' in any performance now without recalling the still-hilarious 1952 recording of it by Joyce Grenfell and Norman Wisdom. Jeremy Nicholas

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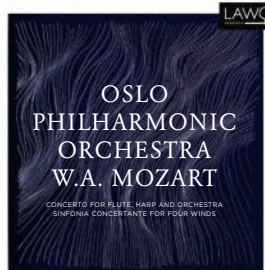
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TOCCATA CLASSICS

Jeremy Nicholas listens to a handful of discs from the label which specialises in music that lies away from the beaten track



Pianist Jonathan Powell offers works by Konstantin Eiges with 'command and authority'

William Hurlstone died in 1906 at the tragically early age of 30 but left behind a substantial body of work. Australian pianist Kenji Fujimura has a PhD on the subject and, while I usually run a mile if I see an artist billed as 'Prof' or 'Dr', in this case scholarship and musicianship are on a par. Most of the music here is early and slight; some is unexpected (an arrangement of Stephen Heller's *Tarantelle* for the left hand). Two pieces are outstanding: Lisztians will recognise the theme of Hurlstone's *Hungarian Air with Variations* from its use in the second (C sharp major) section of the *Hungarian Rhapsody* No 6; the 11 brief and highly contrasted variations, more *englisch* than *ungarische*, would make a delightful sequence in any recital. From three years earlier, the unpublished Piano Sonata in F minor (1894) – the only work on the disc to have previously been recorded (Mark Bebbington – Somm, 10/10) – is a remarkable creation for an 18-year-old. If Hurlstone's warmly lyrical, virtuoso Piano Concerto appeals (Eric Parkin from the late 1970s – Lyrita, 2/80, 1/08) then you'll enjoy the Sonata.

Adolf Jensen (1837-79) is another second-division composer who died young but whose music is much better than his current presence on disc and in the concert hall would indicate. His seven-movement suite *Erotikon*, Op 44 (24'06") from 1873, brim full of charming ideas and not a few

demanding pages, might be described as high-end salon music beholden to Schumann (of whom Jensen was a devoted admirer), Chopin and Liszt. His *Deutsche Suite*, Op 36, is an affectionate pastiche of Baroque dance movements ending with a neatly turned fugal Gigue. Jensen was highly regarded as a song-writer. Three of more than 160 he composed sufficiently impressed Max Reger to transcribe them. These make up a thoroughly enjoyable programme, rather closely recorded but played most appealingly by the Norwegian pianist Erling R Eriksen.

Toccata doesn't espouse a standard label sound – even sometimes on a single disc: listen to the *Sonata rustica* and Five Impromptus which open and close Vol 1 of the piano music of **Alexandre Tansman** (1897-1986), where the sound is less focused and ingratiating than on other tracks. Tansman was a miniaturist at heart (of the 33 tracks, none lasts over six minutes, the shortest a fleeting 50 seconds) and wrote in an eclectic style. Danny Zelibor, in his excellent booklet deftly characterising each piece, for instance describes the harmonies of the *Sept Préludes* (1921) as 'at one turn just shy of a Gershwin song or Scriabin prelude, and at the next [becoming] dense stacks of sound that climb up three staves'. Tansman's compelling *Sonata rustica* (1925) embraces neo-classicism, jazz and polytonality, often chasing between them within a few bars. Not all the works here are as distinctive

or memorable as these but Zelibor shows them in the best possible light. Three of the six works here are first recordings.

I failed to warm so readily to the playing of José Raúl López on the first volume (all hyphenated Mozart) of the complete transcriptions of **Charles-Valentin Alkan**. Perhaps the in-tray photo of López cuddling his two fearsome-looking pet dogs clouded my judgement, but I don't think so. I've always wanted to hear Alkan's arrangement of the great D minor Concerto, K466 (more detailed, ingenious and difficult than Hummel's), but not if it ended up sounding like a laboured performance of early Brahms. Throughout, López is either stretched to his technical limit or short on imaginative musicality, neither of which does either Mozart or Alkan much good. Still, this will just have to do until a Hamelin tackles it.

Pianism and recording quality of a quite different order can be heard on a disc of first recordings of piano music by **Konstantin Eiges** (1875-1950). If, like me, you have never come across the Ukrainian composer-pianist before, his music, to quote Toccata, 'bears the impress of Taneyev, his teacher, and of Scriabin and has points in common with his friends Medtner and Rachmaninov'. Jonathan Powell, who also contributes a detailed, scholarly booklet, plays eight works dating from c1905 to 1933 with the command and authority that only come from deep immersion in the music of this period. I was particularly taken with the *Sonata-Poem* No 1 (1915), the *Dix Préludes* (c1911) and the *Four Pieces* (c1913). Of all these Toccata discs it is Eiges who, for me, offers the most rewarding and consistently satisfying discoveries. **G**

THE RECORDINGS



Hurlstone Complete Piano Music
Kenji Fujimura
Toccata Classics © TOCC0289



Jensen Piano Music, Vol 1
Erling R Eriksen
Toccata © TOCC0232



Tansman Piano Music, Vol 1
Danny Zelibor
Toccata © TOCC0170



Alkan Complete Transcriptions, Vol 1
José Raúl López
Toccata © TOCC0240



Eiges Piano Music
Jonathan Powell
Toccata © TOCC0215

Heinz Holliger

Arnold Whittall delves into the Swiss composer's dark, intense and unsettling sound world inspired by expressionism

Heinz Holliger (b1939) first found fame as an outstanding oboe player, fearless in tackling the most challenging contemporary scores and extending the possibilities of the instrument by way of multiphonics and new fingering techniques. Berio wrote *Sequenza VII* (1969) for him, and many other leading composers, including Krzysztof Penderecki, Lutosławski, Stockhausen and Carter, enriched the repertoire in response to Holliger's remarkable skills as a performer. More recently he has had notable successes as a conductor, revealing a special affinity for the music of composers (such as Schumann and Berg) who have also featured in some way in his own compositions.

Holliger studied composition in his native Switzerland with Sándor Veress (1956-60) and Pierre Boulez (1961-63). From an early stage – for example in *Elis* (1961, rev 1966), a set of piano miniatures evoking the poetry of Georg Trakl – his own music reflected the conviction that the more expressionistic strands of early 20th-century modernism, and their revival after the Second World War, remained the most fruitful source for new music during the second half of the century. In 1966-67 he returned to the poetry of Trakl in *Siebengesang*, an ambitious piece involving female voices, solo oboe, orchestra and electronics. By then he had already completed

'Throughout Holliger's work the acute vulnerability of human beings in hostile environments has been a recurring theme'

his first stage work, *Der magische Tänzer*. But it was during the 1970s that his most distinctive and memorable compositions began to emerge.

Titles such as *Pneuma*, *Cardiophonie* and *Atembogen* indicate a special concern with the fragility and contingency accompanying the actual production of sound by human breath, and throughout Holliger's work the acute vulnerability of human beings in hostile environments has been a recurring theme. The more determinedly that technology and electroacoustics extended the sonorities available for composers, the more important it became to cherish the mysterious, magical properties of sound – to explore their inherent theatricality. Between 1976 and 1980 Holliger devised a pair of short dramatic works, *Come and Go* and *Not I*, using texts by Samuel Beckett, and although he added a third, *What Where*, in 1988, he was by then increasingly focused on the kind of German poetry which, while not explicitly expressionistic after the manner of Trakl, lent itself to his kind of hypnotic sound images. Since the mid-1970s, Friedrich Hölderlin together with Robert Walser and several other Swiss writers have featured prominently in Holliger's compositions, a predilection linking him with composers

HOLLIGER FACTS

Born Langenthal, Switzerland, May 21, 1939

Education Studied the oboe and composition in Berne (1950-60); composition with Boulez in Basle (1961-3)

Career International acclaim as oboe player and teacher after 1960, often appearing in concert with his harpist wife Ursula. Already active as a composer, from 1985

he began to devote more time to conducting, mainly in Switzerland but also internationally

Landmarks in composition

Siebengesang (1966-67); *Pneuma* for wind orchestra, with four radios, organ and percussion (1970); three Beckett chamber operas (1976-88); *Die Jahreszeiten/Scardanelli-Zyklus* (1975-91); Violin Concerto (1993-95, 2002); *Schneewittchen* (1997-98); Partita (1999); *Romancendres* (2003)

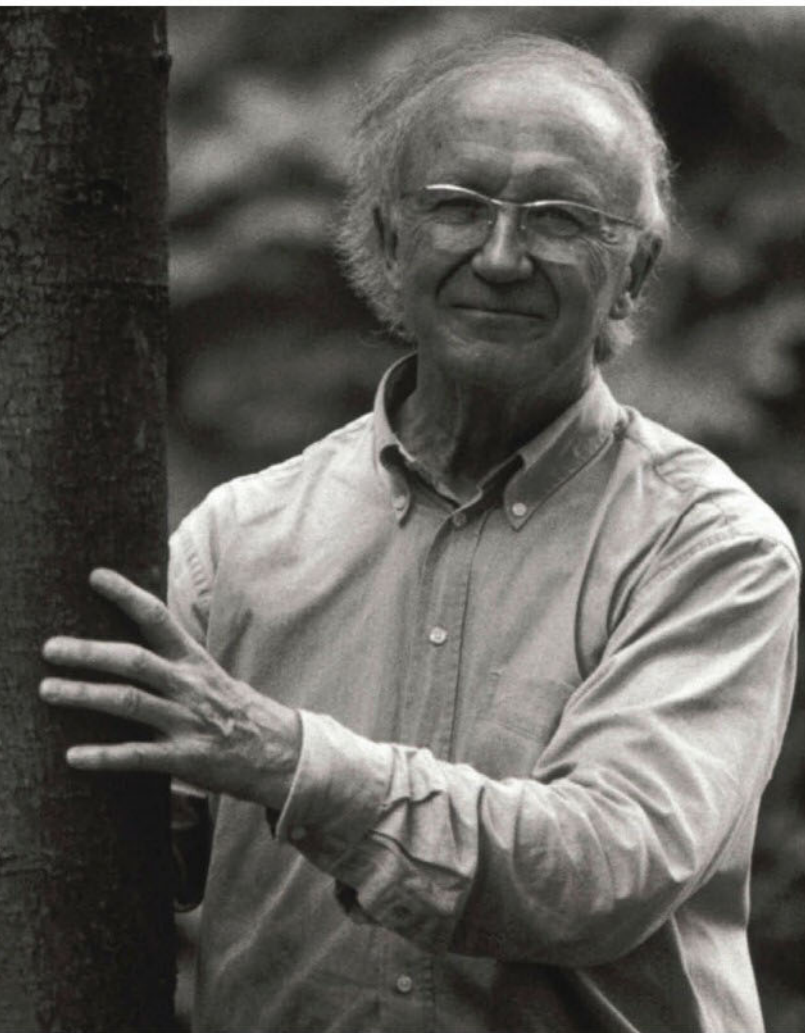
Holliger on Holliger 'I can't work on the basis of abstract methods, even though they fascinate me from a musical perspective; I always need a concrete reference'



like Nono, Helmut Lachenmann and György Kurtág whose often melancholic, far from merely nostalgic modernism has poignantly unstable lyrical impulses at its core.

Holliger's major works from these years include *Scardanelli-Zyklus*, begun in 1975 and finalised in 1991; the song cycle *Beiseit* (1990-91); the opera *Schneewittchen*, first performed in 1998; and the Violin Concerto (1993-95, with an epilogue added in 2002). Since the 30-minute Partita for piano, written in 1999, he has concentrated on relatively short collections of songs and instrumental compositions, including *Puneigä* (2000-02), *Romancendres* (2003) and *Induuchlen* (2004).

What became *Scardanelli-Zyklus* started out as *Die Jahreszeiten*, 12 settings of poems from Hölderlin's years of madness which obsessively hymn the seasons and the sublime grandeur of the natural world. During this time Hölderlin called himself Scardanelli, and Holliger does nothing to mitigate the deep sense of estrangement in music that challenges performers and listeners alike. A particularly wide range of unusual vocal techniques is called for, as the best way of doing justice to the essential poetic paradox: a deeply disturbed mind, producing gently eloquent verse, is matched by music of refined expressiveness which firmly rejects the comforting conventions of the kind of romantic lyricism that other Holliger cycles, like *Beiseit* and *Puneigä*, are more willing to acknowledge. The 'Scardanelli Studies' (*Übungen zu Scardanelli*) which alternate with the vocal movements in the final, recorded version of



His Violin Concerto hints that tormented artists may find consolation in nature

Scardanelli-Zyklus heighten the sonic refinement, as well as demonstrating that rooting music in understated yet unstable expressionistic techniques could work as well near the end of the 20th century as it had at the beginning.

Beiseit ('Set Aside') comprises 12 settings of the Swiss poet Walser (1878-1956), who matched Hölderlin in his descent into madness and silence, and it explores a haunted sound world with clarinet, accordion and double bass accompanying a vocalist (countertenor) whose singing and speaking voices occupy quite different registers. No less intense in their search for continuities of line and feeling are the two books of *Lieder ohne Worte* for violin and piano which Holliger wrote between 1981 and 1994, and these qualities carry over into his most elaborate engagement with Walser's writing, the opera *Schneewittchen* ('Snow White').

Holliger was fascinated by Walser's idiosyncratic way with the familiar fairy-tale, whose unsettling psychological exploration of love and rivalry between mother and daughter is set out in poetry of grave formality. The music has closer affinities with the early-20th-century expressionism of Berg and Webern than with the radical attenuations offered more recently in Nono's *Prometeo* or Lachenmann's *Das Mädchen mit den Schwefelhölzern*. As a result, Holliger risked having to rely on the kind of *arioso* that easily loses focus when extended for any length. Yet there are many compelling episodes, like the sustained lyric lines of *Snow White*'s disconcerting encounter with the Prince, and the potent combination of

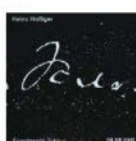
sober restraint and blissful melodic flights in the Epilogue's 'chorale variations'. The instrumentation is alternately ravishing and sinister in Holliger's special manner, with prominent accordion and glass harmonica adding an eerie sheen to the music's gentle gravity.

In the Violin Concerto, perhaps the finest of all his larger-scale compositions, Holliger focuses on Louis Soutter (1871-1942), a Swiss-born violinist and painter whose troubled images of violence and despair have haunted the composer for many years. As a violinist, Soutter studied with Ysaÿe, and the first three movements of the concerto paint an unsparing portrait of virtuosity under strain. Then comes the even darker Epilogue, called 'Before the Massacre' after one of Soutter's macabre paintings (1939), which ECM reproduces in the CD booklet. Not that this Epilogue is entirely devoid of more consolatory qualities, as if to suggest that even the most tormented romantic artist might find some consolation, if only briefly, in nature.

Perhaps for this reason, Holliger has regularly turned to Swiss writers whose poetry echoes such qualities in Hölderlin and Goethe. There is even an excursion into comic-sinister folklorism in *Alb-Chebr* (1991), but the settings of short dialect poems by Anna Maria Bacher (*Puneigä*) and Albert Streich (*Induuchlen*), made between 2000 and 2004, are characteristically questing and radical, with the combination of countertenor and natural horn in *Induuchlen* particularly arresting. No less original is *Romancendres* (2003) for cello and piano, an uncompromising response to Clara Schumann's burning of one of Robert Schumann's manuscripts, and the unprecedented combination of solo percussion with a quintet of flute, clarinet, horn, cello and piano in *Ma'mounia* (2002). Named after a restaurant in Geneva where it was commissioned, this is even more exuberantly fiery and explosive than *Romancendres* – proof of the enduring validity of the radical agenda which Holliger has pursued from his earliest works. **G**

EXPLORING HEINZ HOLLIGER ON DISC

From instrumental miniatures to his Violin Concerto



Scardanelli-Zyklus

Aurièle Nicolet fl / London Voices / Terry Edwards;
Ensemble Modern / Holliger
ECM New Series (P) 437 4412 (7/93)

This compilation of instrumental miniatures with 12 choral settings of Hölderlin is one of Holliger's most imaginative explorations of psychological disturbance and artistic intensity, making appropriately extreme demands on its dedicated performers.



Violin Concerto

Thomas Zehetmair vn / South West German RSO / Holliger
ECM New Series (P) 476 1941 (10/04)

Coupled with Ysaÿe's Sonata in D minor in homage to the violinist and painter who inspired it,

Holliger's concerto is one of the most soul-searching and original contributions to the genre from the post half-century.



Toronto-Exercises. Puneigä. Induuchlen. Ma'mounia

Swiss Chamber Soloists et al
ECM New Series (P) 476 3977

This programme of music written between 2000 and 2011 combines two of Holliger's collections of settings of poems in Swiss dialects with a pair of recent instrumental miniatures.

Vocal



Tim Ashley welcomes a new set of songs by Luigi Dallapiccola: *'The set's star is its pianist, Filippo Farinelli, whose playing is impeccably lapidary and pointillistic throughout'* ► REVIEW ON PAGE 82



David Patrick Stearns on 'Joyce and Tony' at the Wigmore Hall: *'In the Rossini trifles, the specificity of DiDonato's conviction breaks through one's preconceived notions'* ► REVIEW ON PAGE 87

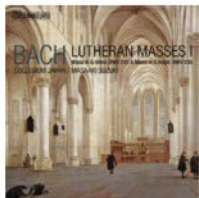
JS Bach

'Lutheran Masses, Vol 1'

Masses – BWV235; BWV236; BWVAnh26 – Kyrie. Sanctus – BWV237; BWV238; BWV240; BWV241; BWV242

Hana Blažiková, Joanne Lunn *sops* Robin Blaze
counterten Gerd Türk *ten* Peter Kooij *bass*

Bach Collegium Japan / Masaaki Suzuki
BIS ③ BIS2081 (66' • DDD/DSD • T/t)



Masaaki Suzuki may have completed his distinguished 20-year

traversal of the sacred cantatas but there are, thankfully, some additional vocal works – secular and Latin works especially – of which the first of two volumes of the short Lutheran Masses, in G minor and G major, launches a new miniseries of miscellany. Additional Mass movement settings, of various degrees of obscurity, contribute to the interest.

The four Masses were assembled from the cantatas, a repository for a significant proportion of the Mass in B minor also. The difference is that early Bach criticism considered it a legitimate practice for the 'Great' Mass but misplaced pragmatism by the composer in the smaller works (which, according to Lutheran practice, set only the *Kyrie* and *Gloria* in Latin). A clutch of exceptional recordings of the Masses – among which those by Herreweghe, Christophers and Pichon stand out – has instead promoted the view that Bach's parody techniques and alteration, transformed from poetic imagery to the generic Ordinary of the Mass, are often rather brilliant. Comparing Suzuki's cantata performances (namely movements from Nos 187, 72, 102, 179, 79, 17 and 138) with these Mass settings reveals the deft way in which Collegium Musicum Japan have avoided the kind of rhetorical signposts of the originals. Some may find the G minor Mass a little too humdrum in its relaxed everyday liturgical ritual but the G major offers a sophisticated and unhurried exegesis of spiritual journeying

(of which Suzuki is a true master), not merely a lush *stile antico* abstraction.

Suzuki's solo 'A team' are out in force and generally deliver excellent and communicative quasi-arias, though Gerd Türk sounds uncomfortable at times in the 'Quoniam' of the G major. The choruses are perhaps a touch less well-heeled and defined than usual, in both consistency and balance, but Collegium Musicum Japan compellingly advocate both Masses as well as the festive *Kyrie* and *Sanctus* settings. The latter are mostly short arrangements by Bach of ready-made German and Italian models, casting light on the practical needs of a busy town church and the Cantor's natural proclivities for serving it. Roll on Vol 2.

Jonathan Freeman-Attwood

Benda

'Music from Eighteenth-Century Prague'

Selections from *Sammlung vermischter Clavier- und Gesangstücke für geübte und ungeübte Spieler*

Ivana Bilej Brouková *sop* Helena Zemanová *vn*
Hana Fleková, Marek Štrýncl *vcs*
Edita Keglerová *hpd*
Supraphon ③ SU4184-2 (76' • DDD)



In the 18th century the Bendas were to Bohemia what the Bachs were to

Thuringia. Most famous of the musical dynasty was Jiří Antonín, or Georg (1722–95), who before he settled as Kapellmeister in Gotha worked as violinist at the Berlin court of Frederick the Great. The most powerful – and most cursed – musical personality at court was Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach, whose influence threads through the four sonatas on this disc, above all the C minor, with its harmonically adventurous opening movement, self-communing *Poco largo* and jerky, angular finale, which delights in destabilising the regular minuet rhythm, à la CPE.

The other sonatas – two for harpsichord, one for violin and keyboard – tend to dilute

the rhetorical extravagances of CPE Bach's style with a decorous classicism. Blandness sometimes threatens, even more so in the featherweight sonatinas, though even at his most compliant Benda can trip you up with a disorienting pause or surprise harmonic twist. Playing on a resonant modern copy of a 1756 Pascal Taskin harpsichord, Edita Keglerová has a sensitive feeling for Benda's idiom, not least in her judgement of *rubato*, and meshes neatly with Helena Zemanová in the amiable dialogues of the G major Violin Sonata.

In the German songs interleaved with the keyboard works, Benda reveals a nice ear for a pretty pastoral tune. But their pastel-pale *galanterie* is not best served by the boyish monochrome soprano of Ivana Bilej Brouková. Both the mock pathos of 'Mir Armen' and 'Romanze' – a tale of country girl outsmarting randy aristocrat that later crops up in Haydn's *Seasons* – call for more guile and point than Brouková can muster. While the sonatas here are certainly worth hearing, a Hyperion disc (1/94) from Emma Kirkby and Rufus Müller makes a much more vivid case for Benda's songs. Richard Wigmore

Birtwistle

'Songs 1970–2006'

Cantus iameus^a. Fantasia III^b. Frieze I^c. Lullaby^d. Nenia: The Death of Orpheus^e. Nine Setting of Lorine Niedecker^f. Orpheus Elegies^g. Songs by Myself^h

^{df}Sophia Körber, ^dSarah Lewark, ^{dh}Alice Rossi *sops*
^gJohannes Euler *counterten* ^gDoga Sacilik *ob* ^fAram Yagubian *vc* ^gJasmin-Isabel Kühne *hp* ^{bc}Kuss Quartet; ^{aeh}Das Neue Ensemble / Stefan Asbury
Toccata Classics ③ TOCCO281 (61' • DDD)
Recorded live 2014. Includes interview (3'09") by Stephan Meier with Sir Harrison Birtwistle



Harrison Birtwistle uses the term 'song' repeatedly in the three-minute

extract from an interview included on the disc – but only to emphasise how



La Pifarescha and the Claudio Monteverdi Choir, Crema, recording Cavalli's *Vespero de Domeniche* under conductor Bruno Gini for Dynamic

accompaniments can become independent of vocal lines, realising their own song-like potential in the process. It therefore makes sense that the last work on the disc, *Cantus iambicus* (2004), is a purely instrumental 'song'. There are also two string quartet movements from *Pulse Shadows* between the various vocal items, though none of *Pulse Shadows*'s own Celan settings; and of the eight movements from 26 *Orpheus Elegies* included, four are instrumental.

Nenia: The Death of Orpheus, written in 1970 as part of the build-up to *The Mask of Orpheus*, was recorded by its commissioner, Jane Manning, in 1971 (Lyrita, 1/75, 10/08). This 'dramatic scene' is powerfully projected here by Alice Rossi, who is no less characterful in the short set of *Songs by Myself* (1984), with Birtwistle providing his own texts for the kind of 'cold thoughts' that often attract him for musical setting. These sparsely accompanied miniatures anticipate the small-scale collections he has favoured in recent times, including the ongoing Lorine Niedecker sequence, setting an American poet whose tiny verses strain hauntingly against conventional grammar and syntax. The singer here is the excellent Sophia Körber.

The sonnets of Rainer Maria Rilke, while also economical, are much more complex poetically, and Birtwistle's incomparable settings of all or part of six of them within his *Orpheus Elegies* can be heard complete in a fine recording by Andrew Watts with Melinda Maxwell and Helen Tunstall (Oboe Classics, 11/09). The booklet with this new CD misses the part-text that is heard in tr 8, but the performance is admirable and all the recordings, taken from an 80th-birthday celebration of Birtwistle's music in Germany, are satisfyingly polished and atmospheric.

Arnold Whittall

Cavalli

Vespero de Domeniche
Claudio Monteverdi Choir, Crema;

La Pifarescha / Bruno Gini

Dynamic © CDS7714 (69' • DDD • T)



In 1616 the 14-year-old Cavalli joined Monteverdi's choir at St Mark's in Venice, and eventually in 1668 he became its *maestro di cappella*. Just a year before his death, he published a collection containing

three sets of Vespers psalms and canticles. One of these is entitled *Vespero delle Domeniche* and is a repertory of music suitable for a relatively ordinary Sunday afternoon Vespers service (rather than a special feast day). The 13 psalms and *Magnificat* are set for eight voices, organised in two antiphonal choirs and doubled by instruments. The Claudio Monteverdi Choir of Crema use two single-voice 'favorito' choirs and two much larger 'ripieno' choirs – a total of 37 singers, far outnumbering La Pifarescha's eight cornetts and sackbuts and a single organist; observers interested in historical performance practice might justifiably quibble about whether cornetts might be anachronistic in music dating from this late in the 17th century.

Lean 'favorito' passages and 'ripieno' choral reinforcements tend to place beauty and sincerity above the pursuit of rhetorical drama, although I would have liked to hear a bit more commanding authority with the text 'In exitu Israel de Aegypto'. You can barely hear a consonant during 'In convertendo Dominus', so instead soft sonorities of Italianate vowels wash over the listener. Likewise, rhythmical vigour is not necessarily a priority, and instead Gini prefers a lilting easiness (eg the Doxology

concluding 'Beatus vir'). Cavalli's occasionally audacious harmonic progressions are brought to the fore by the textural richness of La Pifarescha's sackbuts (such as the striking opening phrases of 'Dixit Dominus'), and there is some exquisite contrapuntal word-painting in the solemn 'De profundis clamavi' (albeit undermined by some imperfect choral tuning). Perhaps one can imagine punchier and more thrilling accounts than these relaxed performances, but the splendid finale to the *Magnificat* is alone worth the price of admission. **David Vickers**

Dallapiccola

'Complete Songs'

Italian Songs of the 17th and 18th Centuries – Vol 1; Vol 2. Quattro Liriche di Antonio Machado. Rencesvals: Trois fragments de 'La chanson de Roland'

Alda Caiello, Monica Piccinini *sops*

Elisabetta Pallucchi *mez* **Roberto Abbondanza** *bar*

Filippo Farinelli *pf*

Brilliant © 95202 (92' • DDD)



Given that the voice dominates Dallapiccola's output, it always seems

surprising that he wrote so few songs. A handful of early efforts were among the works he withdrew in the early 1930s as his politically engaged, anti-Fascist stance developed: they are not included here, in accordance with his wishes. His acknowledged works include only two original song-cycles: *Rencesvals* (1946), written for Pierre Bernac with Poulenc as accompanist, which elides the medieval 'Chanson de Roland' with a depiction of France's suffering during the occupation; and *Quattro Liriche di Antonio Machado* (1948) for high soprano, which looks at new life and a new world through imagery that links the coming of spring with Columbus's discovery of America.

In the late 1950s, however, he undertook a two-volume collection of 17th- and 18th-century songs and arias for the International Music Company in New York, realising the figured basses of the earlier songs himself and transcribing the fully worked-out accompaniments for the later numbers. Two big scenes from his own 1942 edition of Monteverdi's *Il ritorno d'Ulisse in patria* were included, along with familiar songs like Giuseppe Giordano's 'Caro mio ben'. Purists might jib at the shading of much of this repertoire towards art song; but at a time when most realisations of 17th-century music aspired

to lush Romanticism, Dallapiccola proved admirably austere, reducing the accompaniments to the sparest of gestures and allowing the vocal lines to emerge in all their expressive glory. On its own terms, it's a remarkably beautiful achievement.

This marks its first outing on disc. The set's star is its pianist, Filippo Farinelli, whose playing is impeccably lapidary and pointillistic throughout. The singing can be variable. Mezzo Elisabetta Pellucchi sounds grainy and is better in declamation than lyricism. Soprano Monica Piccinini, wonderfully silvery, and glamorous-sounding baritone Roberto Abbondanza are both outstanding. Abbondanza gives us a reflective *Rencesvals*, very different from Dietrich Henschel's angrier approach with pianist Axel Bauni on Orfeo. Alda Caiello, in her sole contribution to the set, is smokily moody in the *Quattro Liriche*: Mojca Erdmann, rapturously sensual on the same Orfeo disc, is marginally preferable here. Even so, this is a hugely important issue, despite its occasional flaws.

Tim Ashley

Machado Songs, Rencesvals – selected comparison:

Henschel, Erdmann, Bauni (ORFE) C558 061A

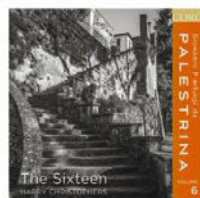
Palestrina

'Volume 6'

Missa L'homme armé a 5. Song of Songs – No 16, Surge, amica mea, speciosa mea; No 17, Dilectus meus mihi; No 18, Surgam et circuibo civitatem. De profundis clamavi. Parce mihi, Domine. Peccantem me quotidie. Si ambulavero in medio tribulationis. Super flumina Babylonis. Tribularer si nescirem. Tribulationes civitatum audivimus

The Sixteen / Harry Christophers

Coro © COR16133 (71' • DDD • T/t)



Like Josquin before him, Palestrina composed two Masses on the 'L'homme

armé' tune, one for four voices on the Dorian, minor-inflected version of the song, and a more extended, earlier five-voice one, based on the Mixolydian, major-oriented one. (Intriguingly, the first 'Kyrie' has unmistakable echoes of the still more famous *Papae Marcelli* Mass.) By the standards of 15th-century settings of the famous tune, even the latter sounds relatively unostentatious, but it is an outgoing, engaging piece for all that, embodying the Roman Counter-Reformation spirit at its most confident. This sort of mood suits The Sixteen's brightly focused choral sound, and Harry Christophers's direction is unobtrusive but telling: the terraced approach to the final

'Kyrie' is a case in point, and the flowering into six voices in the concluding 'Agnus Dei' is particularly lovely. (A more intimate and idiosyncratic reading comes from the soloists of San Petronio in Bologna under Sergio Vartolo, who recorded both *L'homme armé* cycles for Naxos in the mid-1990s.)

Following the pattern established in previous instalments of this very impressive series, the disc also includes a series of motets and three further settings from Palestrina's madrigal cycle from the Song of Songs. Uniformly penitential in nature, the motets form an effective contrast with the Mass, resulting in yet another convincing programme, albeit this time block-like and imposing (*Tribularer si nescirem* is impressively monumental but conveyed without portentousness). One suspects that an ensemble of The Sixteen's acumen could have sought (and found) a touch more variety from piece to piece; that said, the moving *De profundis* manages, like Mozart, to be exquisitely sad in a 'major' mode. **Fabrice Fitch**

Mass – selected comparison:

Bologna Cappella Musicale di St Petronio, Vartolo (NAXO) 8 553315

Poulenc

'The Complete Songs, Vol 5'

Le bal masqué^a. Banalités^b. Le bestiaire^c. Quatre Poèmes d'Apollinaire^d. Quatre Poèmes de Max Jacob^e. Rapsodie nègre^f. Vocalise^g

^a**Sarah Fox** *sop* ^d**Ann Murray**, ^b**Catherine Wyn-**

Rogers *mezs* ^c**Joshua Ellicott** *ten* ^{a,c}**Thomas Allen**,

^d**Thomas Oliemans** *bars* **Malcolm Martineau** *pf*

with **Lisa Friend** *fl* **David Cowley** *ob* **Julian Bliss** *cl*

Jarek Augustyniak *bn* **Simon Desbruslais** *tpt*

Phil White *trbn* **Tamsin Waley-Cohen** *vn* **Gemma**

Rosefield *vc* **Andrew Barnard**, **David Corkhill**,

Gary Lovenest *perc* **Badke Quartet**

Signum © SIGCD333 (61' • DDD • T/t)



The previous volumes in this series have concentrated on

Poulenc's songs with piano. Here, though, the musical horizons broaden out to take in various cycles that call for the accompaniment of variegated instrumental ensembles. Indeed, the *Rapsodie nègre*, composed in 1917 and Poulenc's earliest surviving work, is hardly a song-cycle at all, since four of its five movements are for instruments alone while the central one, 'Honoloulou', is set to nonsense words from some purportedly (but almost certainly spoof) Liberian verse penned by a poet who went under the nom de plume Makoko Kangourou. Here



Baritone Thomas Oliemans, who features in the fifth volume of Malcolm Martineau's Poulenc survey for Signum

Poulenc's thinking is in line with Milhaud's Africa-orientated ballet *La création du monde*, and the colouring he brings to it with flute, clarinet, string quartet and piano is alive with exoticism and wit. The baritone Thomas Oliemans solemnly and lucidly intones the twaddle of 'Honoloulou'.

There are similar melodic inflections associated with the camel in the first song of *Le bestiaire* (1918-19), but here Poulenc is dealing with acknowledged poetry by Apollinaire, epigrammatic cameos of the animal kingdom, which Oliemans and Thomas Allen interpret with captivating charm and character. Allen is also the exuberant soloist in the so-called 'cantate profane' *Le bal masqué*, a wonderful surrealist romp of 1932 that in its angular turns of phrase, its distinctive instrumental timbres and high spirits has much in common with the piano-and-wind Sextet conceived at about the same time.

The tenor Joshua Ellicott eloquently voices the alternating weirdness and volatility of the *Quatre Poèmes de Max Jacob* (1921); and in the two sets that require piano accompaniment only, Ann Murray is spry in the 1931 *Quatre Poèmes d'Apollinaire* (wrongly spelt 'Appollinaire' in the booklet texts), and Catherine Wyn-Rogers is seductively expressive in the *Banalités* of 1941. The

instrumental ensembles, thoroughly in tune with Poulenc's personality, add piquancy to a delightful disc. **Geoffrey Norris**

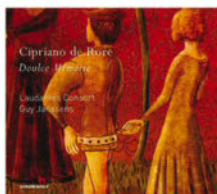
Rore

'Douce mémoire'

Missa Douce mémoire. Parce mihi Domine/Peccavi, quid faciam tibi. Agimus tibi gratias. Infelix ego/Ad te igitur

Laudantes Consort / Guy Janssens

Sonamusica © SONA1504 (54' • DDD • T/t)



Rore's discography hardly reflects his stature, so the chance to hear one of his Masses in multiple interpretations is a rare treat. The Brabant Ensemble's account of *Missa Douce mémoire* is recent but it is more than 20 years since The Tallis Scholars recorded the large-scale motets *Infelix ego* and *Parce mihi*. Against this competition the Laudantes Consort more than hold their own.

Douce mémoire was one of the best-known chansons of its day, its pedigree no doubt enhanced by the fact that the text's author was King Francis I himself. Rore's choice of it as a model may have been motivated by that royal connection, for

it seems quite far removed from his own style. The slightly deeper timbre of the Laudantes Consort gives it the edge over the Brabants, although their take on the Flemish sound is still comparatively light. Markedly slower tempi allow them to linger more broodingly over details, especially in the longer movements; this too seems to me a distinct advantage.

Laudantes' willingness sensitively to inflect the musical text in the Mass is well taken (though a shade overdone in the chordal passages); if anything, one could have done with even more of the same in the motets. Thus, the stand-out moment near the end of *Parce mihi* is a cadence on 'dormiam' (for 'sleep', read 'death'), and at the end of *Infelix ego* the 'miserere' ostinato, hitherto confined to one voice, overtakes the texture in a magnificent *stretto*. Though acknowledged here, these key moments might have been rendered still more expressively. That said, Laudantes' restraint compares favourably with the technically unimpeachable but opaque accounts from The Tallis Scholars. Less than an hour's music is a bit skimpy nowadays, but these new accounts justify their place in the catalogue. **Fabrice Fitch**

Missa Douce mémoire – selected comparison:

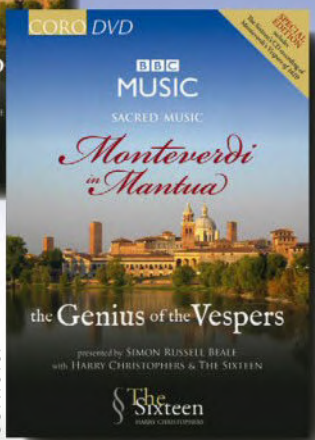
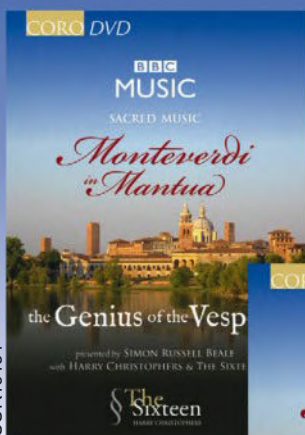
Brabant Ens (9/13) (HYPE) CDA67913

Infelix ego, Parce mihi – selected comparison:

Tallis Scholars (6/94) (GIME) CDGIM029

CORO DVD *The Sixteen*
HARRY CHRISTOPHERS

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MONTEVERDI IN MANTUA: THE GENIUS OF THE VESPERS Presented by Simon Russell Beale With Harry Christophers and The Sixteen

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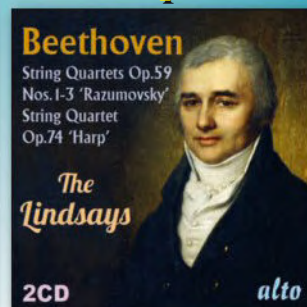


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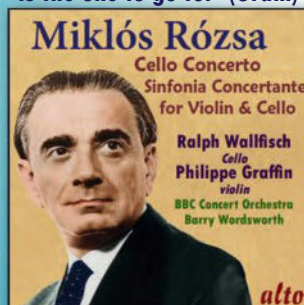
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Schoenberg

Pierrot lunaire, Op 21

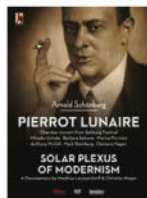
Documentary: Solar Plexus of Modernism

Barbara Sukowa *voc* Marina Piccinini *fl*

Anthony McGill *cl* Mark Steinberg *vn*

Clemens Hagen *vc* Mitsuko Uchida *pf*

Belvedere © DVD 10130 (40' + 52' • NTSC • 16:9 • DD5.1 • 0 • S). Recorded live at the Haus für Mozart, Salzburg Festival 2011



In 2011 pianist Mitsuko Uchida led a suitably moonstruck performance of Schoenberg's 1912

monodrama *Pierrot lunaire* at the Salzburg Festival. Actress Barbara Sukowa, whose work with Rainer Werner Fassbinder spearheaded new directions in German cinema during the 1970s, took the *Sprechstimme* role, as she had already done in 1998 when she recorded the work with Reinbert de Leeuw (Koch). And the ensemble Uchida assembled – Marina Piccinini (flutes), Anthony McGill (clarinets), Mark Steinberg (violin), Clemens Hagen (cello) – punched above its all-star weight in a way that Boulez's similarly starry 1977 performance (Barenboim, Zukerman et al) singularly failed to do.

From the get-go Matthias Leutzendorff and Christian Meyer's excellent documentary, built around Uchida's Salzburg performance, reminds us that it was Igor Stravinsky who labelled *Pierrot lunaire* 'the solar plexus of modernism' and, like *The Rite of Spring*, Schoenberg's grasping at a bold new future was rooted in ancient runes and mythology. Sukowa gives us the low-down on *Sprechstimme*, Schoenberg's half-spoken, half-sung warble that can feel so alien to Anglo-Saxon ears. In non-amplified turn-of-the-century theatres all vocal utterance tended towards the overcooked and hysterical. And, as Marina Piccinini adds, the piece teleports us back to a world where people were actually prepared to take lavish amounts of time and space and deploy extravagant wordage to express themselves.

The documentary is not immune from statements of the bleedin' obvious – that the viola is essentially a lower-pitched violin comes as no surprise – but Uchida's keyboard illustrations prove an essential primer. As she morphs an archetypal Viennese waltz into an atonal reimagining, compositional sources are clarified; as she telescopes inside a key motif, slowing down to repeat its lizarding ugliness, we internalise the ghoulish fear that Schoenberg was trying to communicate. Sukowa's 1998 recording was blighted by

throaty stage laughs and lucky-dip falsettos – a noble misfire. But this new one is clearly the work of someone who has thought about the piece for a long time. Her voice is ethereal, otherworldly, haunted. We feel the air from another planet. Anthony McGill talks up his preference for uncondacted *Pierrots* and the utterly alive in-chatter of the ensemble proves his wisdom. **Philip Clark**

Schubert

'Songs, Vol 2'

Abendbilder, D650. Atys, D585. Auf der Brücke, D853. Auf der Riesenkoppe, D611. Aus Heliopolis – I, D753; II, D754. Dass sie hier gewesen, D775. Des Fischers Liebesglück, D933. Fischerweise, D881. Die Forelle, D550. Geheimnis, D491. Im Frühling, D882. Im Walde (Waldesnacht), D708. Ins stille Land, D403. Der liebliche Stern, D861. Nachtviolen, D752. Sei mir gegrüsst!, D741. Tiefes Lied, 'Im Jänner', D876. Totengräbers Heimweh, D842. Über Wildemann, D884

Ian Bostridge *ten* Julius Drake *pf*
Wigmore Hall Live © WHLIVE0077
(80' • DDD • T/t)

Recorded live, May 22, 2014



Recorded some eight months after Ian Bostridge's first Schubert volume on

Wigmore Hall Live (8/14), this disc similarly mixes better-known Lieder with the sort of mid-level ones that one always means to explore. In this collection, chronological thoroughness is replaced by practicality and accessibility: performances have the right nexus of intelligence, deep study and in-performance inspiration. Bostridge and Julius Drake create song clusters around poetic themes (sometimes achieved by cutting digressive stanzas). Yes, 'Die Forelle' (D550) is grouped among fisherman songs. A meditation on cemeteries progresses into the bitter 'Totengräbers Heimweh' ('Gravedigger's Longing', D842), detailing the classic stages of grief.

No Bostridge Schubert performance is going to have the warm-bath comfort one has from velvet-voice baritones such as Gerhaher. The tenor's rhetorical manner is that of a fevered outsider with words more sharply articulated than ever (compared to more conversational native German singers) as if he's singing Hugo Wolf. This doesn't sit well with songs such as 'Die Forelle'; but he also brings straightforward simplicity to 'Aus Heliopolis I' (D753).

Yet in his recent book, *Schubert's Winter Journey: Anatomy of an Obsession*, Bostridge

periodically cautions against word-painting at every opportunity. In that spirit, he supplies textual articulation and emotional heat but leaves more specific characterisation up to Drake at the piano. Similarly, Bostridge brings extraordinary breath control to 'Im Frühling' (D882), using long vocal lines with architectural cunning. When Schubert repeats a few words at the end of each stanza, the effect can seem like a poetically marginal completion of a musical thought. But Bostridge uses those repeated words to crystallise the meaning of long lines that came before.

His voice has a few more miles on the clock than in his earlier, luminously engineered Schubert recitals for EMI. Also, he periodically tests his lower range, and it rarely goes well. Yet my preference for his earlier Schubert recordings doesn't diminish the many achievements of this Wigmore recital. **David Patrick Stearns**

'Après un rêve'

Berlioz La captive^a Chausson Chanson perpétuelle, Op 37^a Fauré Andante, Op 75. Après un rêve, Op 7 No 1^a. Berceuse, Op 16. Pavane, Op 50. Romance, Op 69 Godard Jocelyn – Berceuse^a Gounod L'absent^a. Romances sans paroles – Le soir^a Massenet Elégie^a. Thaïs – Méditation Saint-Saëns Le carnaval des animaux – Le cygne. Violons dans le soir^a. Allegro appassionato, Op 43

*Karine Deshayes *mez* Ensemble Contraste
Aparté © AP106 (72' • DDD)



In part a homage to the *fin-de-siècle* salon, this is a disc of mélodies with

ensemble accompaniment, and as such has points in common with Marie Nicole Lemieux's 'Chansons perpétuelles' album released earlier this year (Naïve, 6/15). Whereas Lemieux, however, restricted herself to original works, interspersed with German and Russian songs with solo piano, Karine Deshayes and Ensemble Contraste stick with the French repertoire, opting, in places, to use arrangements by the ensemble's pianist Johan Farjot.

Late-19th-century salons, of course, delighted in small-scale versions or excerpts from larger works, and many of the works here existed in multiple arrangements and transcriptions well within their composers' lifetimes, some – Massenet's *Elégie*, for instance – adding a vocal line to a purely instrumental original. Placed beside such numbers as Chausson's 'La chanson perpétuelle', for mezzo and piano quintet,

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or Berlioz's 'La captive', with its cello obbligato, Farjot's adaptations, mostly for piano trio, are judiciously idiomatic, the exception being Fauré's 'Après un rêve' itself, which is prefaced by a rather saccharine string transcription of the song's main melody.

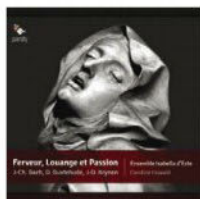
It's nicely done, for the most part. Deshayes has a light-ish mezzo with an appealing shimmer in her upper registers and warm chest tones, used sparingly, but to telling effect, in Saint-Saëns's 'Violons dans le soir'. Her diction isn't great – there are more than a few dropped consonants – and no texts are provided, which places her at a further disadvantage. The playing is consistently beautiful, and the spattering of purely instrumental numbers really allows the Ensemble Contraste to shine. In the context, both the Méditation from *Thaïs* and Saint-Saëns's 'Le cygne' emerge very much as songs without words. The latter, in particular, sounds wonderfully poised and eloquent as played by the ensemble's outstanding cellist Antoine Pierlot.

Tim Ashley

'Ferveur, louange et passion'

J Christoph Bach Mein Freund ist mein und ich bin sein **C Bernhardt** Fürchtet euch nicht **Buxtehude** Klag-Lied, BuxWV76. Sonata, BuxWV257 **Krynén** Zu Gott sollst du nicht schreien **Kühnel** Sonata a due **Rosenmüller** Das ist meine Freude **Schein** Aus tiefer Not schrei ich zu dir. Christ unser Herr, zum Jordam kam. Erbarm dich, O Herre Gott

Ensemble Isabelle d'Este / Caroline Howald
Paraty © PARATY415133 (67' • DDD • T/t)



This programme was inspired by viol player Caroline Howald's admiration for 'Mein

Freund ist mein und ich bin sein' by Johann Christoph Bach (the cousin of Johann Sebastian's father). The conductor's note offers platitudes about 'beauty', the 'expression of life in all its forms' and ecstatic yearning, and secularises religious rapture into what she likes to call 'the energy of Eros' (hence the cover image of Bernini's *Ecstasy of St Theresa*), but not one word of explanation that this nine-minute chaconne is extracted from the wedding dialogue *Mein Freundin, du bist schön* – it represents the enraptured 'beloved' walking towards a garden, anticipating what might happen there when she meets her lover. Howald divides the solo voice part between two sopranos, 'to show both sides of amorous passion: the lover full of immense desire but doubting...and the lover as

passionately in love but fully delighted and made luminous with desire'. A revolving door of basso continuo instrumentation, extensive ornamentation and the use of tremolo are designed to 'express, underline or reinforce these two sides'. The obbligato violin part is played rapturously by Chiara Banchini, and Michiko Takahashi and Cécile Granger sing attractively, but when they briefly join together in unison the effect is jarringly unnatural. The distractions and imperfections have their antidote in several superb, accurate and complete recordings.

Three short pieces for two interweaving voices and detailed continuo realisations from Schein's *Opella nova* (published 1618) represent 'distress and beseeching', whereas the new work *Zu Gott sollst du nicht schreiben*, commissioned from Jean-Dominique Krynén, applies an atonal language to rhetorical figurations steeped in the Baroque idiom. The conceptual experiment to use religious music to convey 'earthly eroticism' and 'elevated sexuality' culminates incongruously with the lament composed by Buxtehude for his own father's funeral in 1674 (*Klag-Lied*); its instrumental parts are 'diversified' (ie tinkered with). The self-conscious interventionism means that I'm not entirely sure who this album is supposed to gratify beyond the creative instincts of the performers themselves. **David Vickers**

'Hör, Kristenhait!'

'Sacred Songs by the Last of the Minnesingers'
Anonymous Indescort. Maria tusolacium. Pulcherrima de virgine. Virginem mire pulchritudinis **Beheim** Vom heiling geist/ Heilliger Geist, rat und volleist **Loqueville** O regina clementissima **Monk of Salzburg** Das guldein vingerlein des münchs/Mein trost Maria raine mait. Heyligs kreucz ein paum gar aine. Maria ward ein pot gesannndt. O Maria pya. Von anegeng der sunne kchlar **Sicher** Resonet in laudibus **Wolkenstein** Ave, mater, o Maria. Hör, kristenhait!. In Suria ain braiten hal. Keuschlich geboren. Mich tröst ain adeliche mait
Ensemble Leones / Marc Lewon
Christophorus © CHR77395 (79' • DDD • T)



Leones have chosen German medieval sacred music, mainly of the late 14th century, with a concentration on Oswald von Wolkenstein, about whom we know a great deal, and the Monk of Salzburg, about whom we know virtually nothing.

Ever adventurous in their choice of programmes, for their sixth CD Ensemble

Both are relatively familiar figures in the catalogue but this CD is adventurous mainly because Leones are not about to shorten a song to make it easy listening: the 14 minutes of the Monk's *Das guldein vingerlein* rely entirely on the vital singing of Sabine Lutzenberger and Raitis Grigalis; the eight minutes of Oswald's *Ave mater, o Maria* – far more, I think, than anybody has previously tried to record – maintain the same ensemble throughout.

Instrumental performance is entirely in the brilliant hands of Marc Lewon (who directs the ensemble) and Baptiste Romain, with a wide variety of instruments discreetly employed. Lutzenberger is now well known as one of the peerless singers for this kind of repertory, and she decidedly adds to her honours in his recording. A word of warning is perhaps in order: although Lewon's lucid booklet-note is translated into English and French, the original texts are translated only into modern German. That may not be the end of the world, though, because some of these texts are pretty turgid: the virtues are in their performance. **David Fallows**

'Joyce & Tony'

'Live at Wigmore Hall'

Arlen Over the Rainbow **I Berlin** I love a piano **Bolcom** Amor **E Curtis** Non ti scordar di me **C Dougherty** Love in the dictionary **S Foster** Beautiful Dreamer **Haydn** Arianna a Naxos, HobXXVlb/2 **Kern** Leave it to Jane - The Siren's Song. Oh, My Dear - Go little boat. Show Boat - Life upon the wicked stage; Can't help lovin' dat man. Very Warm for May - All the things you are **Moross** A Lazy Afternoon **H Nelson** Lovely Jimmie **Rodgers** My Funny Valentine **Rossini** Beltà crudele. La danza **Santoliquido** I canti della Sera **Villa-Lobos** Magdalena - Food for thoughts

Joyce DiDonato *mez* **Sir Antonio Pappano** *pf*
Erato © 2 2564 61078-9 (95' • DDD • T/t)
Recorded live at the Wigmore Hall, London, September 6 & 8, 2014



addition of Antonio Pappano – and the overall air of a musical holiday – makes a difference. Over these two discs, music that needs special pleading certainly gets it, especially with the little-known composers of the first half, though the second disc of more popular repertoire threatens to run amok.

With its mixture of recitative and arioso, Haydn's *Arianna a Naxos* scene can

Joyce DiDonato concerts are never demure events. The question is how the

grow tedious. But DiDonato's remarkable evolution as an actress now allows her to convey dramatic precision while respecting the music's classical outlines. Where she might have pushed her voice harder in years past, she now seems to look more deeply into her vocal core for fine shades of emotion that catch the most minute change of mood. If there's a single moment that illustrates DiDonato's growth from an effective artist to one who achieves greatness, it's the vocal *decrescendo* that suggests her lover's ships fading into the horizon. Such things can be gimmicky, but here DiDonato conveys the cold slap of reality: he's not coming back – an effect underscored by reverberant recorded sound that conveys just how alone Ariadne is.

The harmonic extravagance of *I canti della Sera*, a song-cycle by Francesco Santoliquido (1883-1971) that feels like theatrically astute Rachmaninov, shows how DiDonato and Pappano effectively cut away anything that's interpretatively extraneous – in one of the few recordings anywhere of this once-acclaimed composer who fell into eclipse for his Fascist politics. The shamelessly lyrical Ernest de Curtis (1875-1937) could easily be cabaret music. But, as in the two Rossini trifles on the disc, the specificity of DiDonato's conviction breaks through one's preconceived notions about the respective genres.

Because these performances feel so right, the mis-steps in the second disc's popular songs seem more obvious, suggesting that the diva is slumming it (even though she knows better). The first song group begins with a downright celestial version of Stephen Foster's 'Beautiful Dreamer', arranged by David Krane with Impressionist chords suggesting Ives's *Central Park in the Dark*. It's also here that DiDonato's voice has an especially attractive plaintive quality, her small, quick vibrato recalling Frederica von Stade's prime.

Elsewhere, in song choices that include rarities by Celine Dougherty and Heitor Villa-Lobos, DiDonato and Pappano are increasingly cavalier in ways that no doubt made the live event great fun but distract from the music's content. DiDonato certainly has the voice to give 'A Lazy Afternoon' the understated eroticism of Kaye Ballard (in the original 1954 cast album of *The Golden Apple* on RCA Victor), but seems only able to pull back in time for her standard encore, 'Over the Rainbow', an irresistible talisman for this Kansas-born mezzo who, unlike her *Wizard of Oz* counterpart, will rule our Emerald Cities for years to come.

David Patrick Stearns

'Leiden Choirbooks, Vol 6'

'The Leiden Choirbooks - Codex F'

Music by **Flamingus, Hellinck, Manchicourt, Mergot, Sermisy and Anonymous**

Egidius Kwartet and College

Etccetera Ⓢ Ⓣ KTC1415 (157) • DDD • T/t



The traversal of an idiosyncratic corner of 16th-century polyphony comes to an end with this double-CD, which focuses on the Masses contained in the sixth and last of this set of choirbooks from Leiden. The first CD contains two cycles, one by Pierre de Manchicourt (a composer with a small but distinguished discography) and the other by Lupus Hellinck (whose representation in the catalogue is slimmer still). This reportorial approach contrasts with the second disc, which presents a Mass by the far better-known Claudin de Sermisy, this time in the context of a liturgical reconstruction – a genre that has somewhat fallen out of fashion. Sermisy's sacred music is so rarely recorded nowadays as to make this issue self-recommending, especially as the performance of his Mass is the most assured of the three cycles. In other ways, too, this is much the stronger and individual of the two discs, from the believable timbre of the celebrants (in tune but seeming vocally untrained) to the singers of polyphony, who sound most at ease in the two fine motets that bookend the Mass, both by more obscure, probably local figures. Finally, the responses that are interspersed in the plainsong are a welcome chance to hear a rare example of functional polyphony of this time and place being committed to paper.

The first disc finds the Egidius Kwartet and its associated College in more uncertain form. This is attributable (at least in part) to programming, for not only are the Masses by Hellinck and Manchicourt in the same mode, which induces a certain monotony; the same top note occurs repeatedly in both, drawing attention to the sopranos' tendency to strain on that pitch. But a firmer hand on the tiller might also have kept the tempo from flagging (as in the longer movements of Hellinck's mass, for example), making life easier for the sopranos as well. At its best, however, the choir gels well, the teething problems of the early volume all but forgotten. One might say that this final volume encapsulates the strengths and occasional shortcomings of the set as a whole, but the overall impression is still positive: how many record labels nowadays would

commit to as specialised and ambitious a project as this? **Fabrice Fitch**

'Morgen!'

Brahms Fünf Lieder, Op 72 – No 1, Alte Liebe;

No 4, Verzagen. Da unten im Tale, WoO33 No 6.

Die Mainacht, Op 43 No 2. Nicht mehr zu dir zu

gehen, Op 32 No 2. Ständchen, Op 106 No 1.

Wiegenlied, Op 49 No 4 **Reger** Sechzehn

Gesänge, Op 62 – No 2, Waldseligkeit; No 12,

Totensprache. Der bescheidene Schäfer, Op 97

No 4. Es schläft ein stiller Garten, Op 198, No 4.

Schlummerlied **Schumann** Myrthen, Op 25 –

No 1. Widmung; No 25, Aus den östlichen Rosen.

Sechs Gedichte, Op 90 – No 6, Der schwere

Abend; No 7, Requiem. Aufträge, Op 77 No 5.

Schneeglöckchen, Op 79 No 26. Volksliedchen,

Op 51 No 2 **R Strauss** Acht Gedichte aus 'Letzte

Blätter', Op 10 – No 4, Die Georgine; No 6, Die

Verschwiegenen; No 7, Die Zeitlose. Vier Lieder,

Op 27 – No 1, Ruhe, meine Seele!; No 4, Morgen.

Befreit, Op 39 No 4. Einerlei, Op 69 No 3

Michaela Schuster *mez* **Markus Schlemmer** *pf*

Oehms Ⓢ OC1833 (71) • DDD • T). Recorded live

at the Kultursaal, Eppan, July 12, 2012



The German mezzo Michaela Schuster is best known as an operatic animal, with a repertoire that includes big-hitting Wagner and Strauss roles. This recital from the Eppaner Liedsommer (recorded live, we are told, but without the slightest peep from the audience) shows a different side to her artistry, as well as displaying some pros and cons resulting from her stage career. The voice itself is remarkably powerful but hardly caressing on the ear; it takes quite a few breaths to keep nourished and at lower volumes is less than ideally steady. It's a sort of voice that we don't often hear on disc in song these days. Which is a shame, because Schuster is an instinctive artist and the interpretations themselves are wonderful. As a native speaker, her way with the German is totally natural and she inhabits the poetry completely. This often translates into musical performances of compelling sensitivity and moving intensity, while she is also able to turn on the folkish charm in Brahms's 'Da unten im Tale' or in a melting 'Wiegenlied'.

The programme itself is a fascinating mixture of the well and less well known, with each of the four composer-led groups covering, roughly, a trajectory from optimism to melancholy or liveliness to sleep; the Reger songs are especially well chosen and show him as very much capable of holding his head high in this exalted company. Although Schuster is excellent in the excited expressions of first love – her



'This Kansas-born mezzo will rule our Emerald Cities for years to come': Joyce DiDonato, captured live at the Wigmore Hall with Sir Antonio Pappano on Erato

'Widmung', for example, is urgent, her 'Aufträge' ardently impatient – she is perhaps at her best in the more thoughtful and fateful numbers, where Markus Schlemmer, a sensitive accompanist throughout, cleverly emphasises his piano's lower range. Schumann's 'Der schwere Abend' and 'Requiem' take on a powerful gravitas, as do Reger's 'Totensprache' and Strauss's 'Ruhe, meine Seele!'. In 'Befreit' Schuster lacks the supreme control of, say, a Jessye Norman and needs a pause ahead of the song's final, climactic 'weinen', but it is a deeply affecting performance which, like that of 'Morgen' itself, is suffused with just the right sense of gentle sadness.

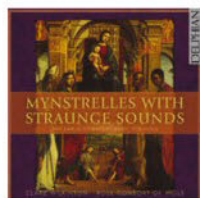
It's a shame that Oehms fails to provide translations to accompany the texts in the booklet, but don't let that put you off this moving and rewarding recital. **Hugo Shirley**

'Mynstrelles with Straunge Sounds'

A Agricola Cecus non iudicat de coloribus **Anchieta** Con amores, la mi madre **Anonymous** And I were a maiden^a. **Biblis**. De tous biens plaine. Fortuna desperata. In te Domine sperabo. La quercia. La Spagna **Cornysh** Fa la sol **Encina** Fata la parte^a. Triste España^a **Ghizeghem** De tous biens plaine^a **Henry VIII** Helas madame^a **Isaac** Missa La Spagna – Agnus Dei II **Josquin** Adieu

mes amours^a. De tous biens plaine. In te Domine speravi^a **J Martini** Des biens amors. La martinella **Peñalosa** Vita dulcedo/Agnus Dei II (Missa Ave Maria)^a **J Ponce** La mi sola Laureola^a

^a**Clare Wilkinson** *mez* **Rose Consort of Viols** Delphian © DCD34169 (67' • DDD • T/t)



The Rose Consort of Viols' first collaboration with mezzo-soprano Clare

Wilkinson, the Awards-nominated 'Adoramus te' (Deux-Elles, A/14), was a domestic affair, exploring the English repertoire of William Byrd and Peter Philips. Now, in their follow-up disc 'Mynstrelles with Straunge Sounds', they broaden their scope to include the music of the continent in works from Josquin, Isaac, Peñalosa and their lesser-known contemporaries. Subtitled 'The earliest consort music for viols', the album exposes a nascent repertoire still in the process of finding its textures and techniques – a musical portrait of an entire genre under construction. The variety of responses to this new instrumental phenomenon is striking, ranging from anonymous homophonic dances and simple song

accompaniments to elaborate, large-scale chamber works like Alexander Agricola's *Cecus no iudicat de coloribus* and Johannes Martini's *La martinella* – some of the first examples of true chamber music.

Wilkinson's androgynous, straight tone chafes vividly against the viols – a smooth gloss on a pitted sound that creates necessary variety and beauty in a disc that might easily have been a historical curiosity. National variety in style and character adds further interest, taking us from lively Spanish dances to contemplative melancholy from Josquin.

Anyone familiar with the Rose Consort's signature soft-grained, dusky sound will be startled by the rougher textures on display here. The ensemble play a set of instruments modelled on those depicted in a 1497 altarpiece from Bologna, and the effect is bright, forward – even brassy at times – a less sophisticated tone than we're used to, certainly, but also one that mirrors rather evocatively the modal rusticity of many of these works. Rather than blending into a coherent body of sound, the viols each retain an assertive individual voice, allowing the ear to follow the details of part-writing. The results are fascinating, and much closer to a live encounter than a recording. **Alexandra Coghlan**

REISSUES

Peter Quantrill on Karl Böhm's Indian summer and **James Jolly** on a magnificent Beaux Arts Trio box-set

Ripeness is all



Karl Böhm's late recordings are celebrated in DG's latest 23-disc box-set

Handsomely produced in a glossy box with lift-off lid, with more than one eye on the Japanese market – which these days remains particularly significant for such *omnium gatherums* of maestro-worship – DG's box of **Karl Böhm – Late Recordings** begins and ends (chronologically speaking: the set is organised by composer B-W) with Beethoven. Set down in Dresden in 1969, the *Fidelio* and *Leonore* No 3 overtures (extracted from the complete recording) are fast and fiery, driven with theatrical calculation around the corners from Florestan's dungeon into the light of *Leonore's* theme and pressing through the climactic confrontation without a bathetically false preparation for the Minister's arrival, as though Pizarro were standing ready with his knife.

Such vigour is often notable by its absence from the remainder of the set, where late means what you think it ought to, measured and monumental, if rarely invested with the serene wisdom of a Sándor Végh or the magus magnetism of a Karajan. Böhm was no philosopher-conductor but a working

practical musician to his fingertips who was granted a golden hour by both a late-flowering relationship with the London Symphony Orchestra and DG's willingness to let him record 'unlikely' repertoire.

The two developments came into phase with Tchaikovsky's last three symphonies in recordings that will never be anyone's 'library choice' but will always challenge the notion of a music mired in its own historical geography. This was Previn's and Bernstein's LSO, conditioned to play this music in fifth gear, and yet in the unlikely space of St John's Smith Square producing a Fifth of spare, deceptively simple good sense – and by the accounts of various players documented in the Andante set (alas deleted) of their Salzburg concerts, hugely enjoying the experience. There's a hint of Russian Brahms about the rhythms of the slow movement, but such performances remind me of how little Tchaikovsky understood his contemporary when he asserted his own need to write personally, with a narrative in mind (as though Brahms were not composing himself with every bar he wrote). When the finale of the *Pathétique* is done

like this, with a steady accumulation and ebbing-away of force, it bears no trace of self-pity and takes on all the more appalling implications of a death foretold.

Böhm's last recording of *Ein Heldenleben* similarly deflects, or pricks the bubble of, autobiographical aggrandisement, in a tautly drawn account of dry wit (the chattering of the hero's adversaries) and muscular pride (the battle and coda). In his original review (6/77) Richard Osborne lamented the absence of 'cajoling warmth' and 'easy sensuousness', which seems fair, though again such qualities are no more present in his 1950s Berlin recordings (on Audite and DG): my own view is that what made Böhm the eternal cynic, cruel rehearser and cool pit operator also made him an ideal interpreter of Strauss (and the da Ponte operas, *Tristan* and *The Ring*) and dancing partner for the Vienna Philharmonic. The orchestra's fallibility or carelessness is not so damaging here as it is in the Seventh and Eighth Symphonies of Bruckner, which survive brass mishaps to show the take-it-or-leave-it, reassuringly expensive class of a dented Bentley, sold as seen.

There are two *sinfonie concertanti*: K297b for winds (that probably isn't by Mozart) is paced with the same avuncular patience as Haydn's tribute to the soloists of Salomon's orchestra in London; in both cases, the Viennese play as only they know how, with almost insolent sweetness – as they still do for Zubin Mehta, another adopted son. The symphonies (Nos 88-92 of Haydn, Nos 29, 35 and 38-41 of Mozart) survive their age less well, glutinous and cosy compared to Böhm's Mozart symphonies with the Concertgebouw in the 1950s (now in a DG Original Masters set). The two sacred works (Mozart's Requiem, Beethoven's *Missa solemnis*) do not rouse themselves from a dirge-like procession often enough to persuade me that Böhm searched beyond the ritual and behind the words as he did with the operas cited above.

Beyond the Viennese Schubert (Fifth and Eighth symphonies), Schumann (Fourth), Strauss waltzes and polkas (complete with deadpan 'Und so weiter' at the end of the *Perpetuum mobile*) and Wagner (two discs of bleeding chunks from *Rienzi* to *Parsifal*) is another absorbingly 'straight' (or unidiomatic) encounter with strange repertoire, Dvořák's Ninth. At least Böhm makes it sound strange: estranged from Bohemia just as the composer had been, gestures and episodes clear-cut, sequences built with the cumulative intensity of his work on *Tristan*, textures not so much illuminated as pierced by the Viennese oboe that is no less a dominant quality of

these recordings than the sound of Sydney Sutcliffe in Otto Klemperer's last decade with the Philharmonia. Which brings us back to Beethoven, and the Ninth made in November 1980, nine months before his death in the middle of both the Salzburg Festival and his work on a new film of *Elektra*. Like Klemperer, he defies you to hear the outer movements faster. They are meticulously controlled not in the matter of bar-to-bar attacks but the articulation of a spirit of resilience (the horns at the first movement's climax are properly terrifying). This is an old survivor's Ninth, and the slow movement's hymn, never more akin to its counterpart in the Op 132 quartet, is all the more moving for it. **Peter Quantrill**



The Beaux Arts Trio in its original line-up: Guilet, Pressler and Greenhouse

Few box-sets released in the past couple of years have given me as much pleasure as the Beaux Arts Trio's 60th-anniversary **Complete Philips Recordings** – 60 discs which sell for about £90. Handsomely packaged in a gold, burgundy and blue box, this is a feast of extremely classy chamber music-making. And it's not confined to piano trios: the BAT regularly invited guests to join them, allowing them to expand to embrace piano quartets, piano quintets, even Schubert's *Trout* Quintet.

The glue that held this extraordinary trio together was the pianist Menahem Pressler, today a sprightly 91 years old and enjoying a remarkable Indian summer, and who took part in the BAT's first performances back in 1955. This set features four of the trio's many line-ups: from 1955 to 1968 it comprised Daniel Guilet (violin), Bernard Greenhouse (cello) and Pressler (BAT1); from 1968 to 1992 the violinist was Isidore Cohen (BAT2); in 1987 cellist Peter Wiley replaced Greenhouse (BAT3) and in 1992 Ida Kavafian took over as the violinist (BAT4). Later on, and beyond the range of this set, there were three further members before the BAT gave its final performance in 2008.

At the heart of the BAT's repertoire were the great piano trios of the Classical and Romantic eras: the Haydns, the Beethovens, the Schuberts. The set of the Haydn trios (with BAT2) is one of their greatest achievements; it won them a *Gramophone* Recording of the Year Award back in 1979 and the energy, imagination and sheer style still bring a smile to the lips. It's simply a magnificent example

of chamber musicianship and, as Robin Golding remarked back in February 1984, 'When they came out, the performances were immediately recognised as being of the highest artistic quality, backed by exemplary recording techniques. The completed venture must be counted as one of the most remarkable and successful achievements in the history of the gramophone record.'

The Beethovens were recorded by both BAT1 (in 1964) and BAT2 (in the early 1980s); both are included in the set. So what changed in the 20 years between the two cycles? You might be forgiven for homing in on the violin line (Cohen having replaced Guilet) but you'd be looking in the wrong place. As Rob Cowan put it back in November 2001: 'The principal route of the Beaux Arts' interpretative development was forged by the pianist, Menahem Pressler, whose increased tonal subtlety and willingness to widen expressive dynamics lent the trio a whole new palette of colours. Just listen to the opening of Op 1 No 2's ineffably deep *Largo con espressione*. Heard superficially, there's not that much in it between the Pressler of the 1960s and of 1980, but labour the comparison and you'll soon hear the benefits of a more variegated touch and a freer approach to phrasing.' Both sets make for rewarding listening and the differences are fascinating. Similarly there are two versions of the Schubert, Mozart, Mendelssohn, Brahms, Schumann, Tchaikovsky, Fauré and Shostakovich Second trios. The Ravel was done three times: in 1956 and 1968 (both by BAT1), and in 1983 (BAT2). As Tully Potter points out in his superb note (an absolute must-read), Daniel Guilet had known Ravel well and had toured throughout France with him as a duo, so the Trio had a direct link to the

work and must be able to claim some special role here: all three performances are very fine – if pushed I'd probably opt for the 1968 version.

As well as the core piano trio repertoire (and there's a surprising amount of it), the Beaux Arts Trio were champions of newer or more unusual music for their line-up and this set contains splendid performances of trios by Hummel, Arensky, Clara Schumann, Turina, Korngold, Zemlinsky, Ives (a superb piece), Rochberg, Baker and Rorem.

And of the Beaux Art Trio and friends? Joined by viola player Walter Trampler in 1974, the Brahms piano quartets fairly crackle with

excitement (Pressler and Cohen are especially fine here). Another viola player, Bruno Giuranna, joins BAT2 for the Mozart piano quartets; again they're superb – as Lionel Salter said in October 1984, 'The playing is virile yet highly sensitive; brilliant but never remotely flashy: the scale is always classical, and although the performances are full of temperament, there is never any hint of self-indulgence.' Other fine performances with the expanded BAT include Schumann's Piano Quartet and Quintet and Schubert's *Trout*, while the works with orchestra include something of a BAT party piece, Beethoven's Triple Concerto, of which there are two versions: one with the LPO and Haitink (BAT2) and the other with the Gewandhaus Orchestra and Masur (BAT3). Both are excellent; the Masur probably has the edge in terms of *joie de vivre*. (Pressler also goes solo for a fine Leipzig account of the *Choral Fantasy*.)

The two disappointments are the Shostakovich Piano Quintet (BAT3 with Eugene Drucker and Lawrence Dutton of the Emerson Quartet) – despite a near-perfect *Scherzo*, it simply doesn't gel – and the 1970 recording of the Tchaikovsky Trio, which omits one of the variations (but then that was remedied when BAT3 returned to the work in 1988).

So what would £90 buy these days? Very little that's as heart-warming, uplifting and lasting as this superb legacy. Treat yourself!

James Jolly

THE RECORDINGS

'Karl Böhm - Late Recordings'

Various artists and orchestras

DG © (23 discs) 479 4371GB23

Complete Philips Recordings Beaux Arts Trio

Decca © (60 discs) 478 8225DB60

Opera



Richard Wigmore welcomes a new DVD of Schubert's *Fierrabras*:

'Unpretentious and consistently pleasing on the eye, the staging is a refreshing contrast to so many productions' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 95**



Mike Ashman on a groundbreaking new Ring from Mannheim:

'Perhaps the biggest coup of the cycle is the presentation of Siegfried as simple innocent in clownface' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 99**

Albinoni

'Opera Arias and Instrumental Music'

Ardelinda - Doppo tetra e tenebrosa^a; Se avessi più d'un core^a. **Eraclea** - Il mio crin su l'alto soglio^a; Ristoro degli affliti^a; Se premio alla costanza^a. **La gare generoso** - La mia gloria e l'amor mio. La mia sorte vo' conoscere. Vedrem se possa mio brando invitto. **L'inconstanza schernita** - Quel sembiante e quel bel volto^a. **Statira** - Vien con nuova orribil guerra^a. **Zenobia** - Sinfonia. Concerto a cinque, Op 5 No 5. Sinfonia si sette

^aAna Quintans *sop*

Concerto de' Cavalieri / Marcello Di Lisa

Deutsche Harmonia Mundi © 88875 08192-2 (56' • DDD • T/t)



Posterity has been kind to the various concertos of the Venetian dilettante

Albinoni (1671-1750/51) published in his lifetime, but his prolific activities as a composer of vocal music are scantily preserved. He composed at least 50 full-scale operas but only *Zenobia* and *Statira* survive in complete form (there is also a complete score of *Engelberta*, composed jointly with Gasparini). Otherwise only fragments survive. It is therefore with justifiable pride that Concerto de' Cavalieri's anthology claims to be 'a unique experience, since for the first time in recording history we have a complete overview concerning Albinoni as an opera composer'.

The recital's opening gambit is the lively sinfonia from Albinoni's first opera *Zenobia* (Venice, 1694), and another splendidly rousing racket is made in the battle aria 'Vien con nuova orribil guerra' from *Statira* (Rome, 1726); Ana Quintans's brilliant singing proves a match for the splendid trumpet obbligato and rattling timpani. In contrast, there are melodic sweetness and *concertante* strings in 'Quel sembiante e quel bel volto' from *L'inconstanza schernita* (Venice, 1727), and a reconstructed solo flute part makes a lively contribution to 'La mia sorte vo' conoscere' from *Le gare generose* (Venice, 1712). Lasting just under an hour, this

whistle-stop tour of Albinoni's operatic output across nearly 40 years concludes with the amiable *aria di tempesta* 'Doppo tetra e tenebrosa' from *Ardelinda* (Venice, 1732). There are a few musicological errors in Mario Marcarini's booklet-note and it is not mentioned that arias attributed to Albinoni in a Neapolitan manuscript of *Eraclea* (Genoa, 1705) are probably spurious. Concerto de' Cavalieri's boldly committed playing, Di Lisa's energetic conducting and Quintans's stylish singing reveal Albinoni's talents for musical invention and tunefulness. I have only one caveat: the acoustic at Rome's Parco della Musica has a peculiarly brittle springiness. **David Vickers**

Monteverdi

Orfeo

Furio Zanasi *bar* Orfeo
Arianna Savall *sop* Euridice
Montserrat Figueras *sop* La Musica
Sara Mingardo *contr* Messenger
Cecile van de Sant *mez* Speranza
Antonio Abete *bass* Caronte
Adriana Fernández *sop* Proserpina
Fulvio Bettini *bar* Apollo
Marilla Vargas *sop* Nymph
Daniele Carnovich *bass* Plutone
La Capella Reial de Catalunya;

Les Concerts des Nations / Jordi Savall

Alia Vox © ② AVSA9911 (114' • DDD • T/t)

From BBC Opus Arte DVD OA0842D (2/03)



Opus Arte's DVD of Gilbert Deflo's staged production of *Orfeo* at Barcelona's

Gran Teatre del Liceu was given a thorough assessment by Jonathan Freeman-Attwood in these pages 13 years ago. However, this remixed and remastered audio-only version on hybrid SACD is the latest in the series of lavish reissues produced by Jordi Savall's own label Alia Vox, and enables us to concentrate solely on musical aspects. The beautifully designed, lavishly illustrated book also provides plenty of reading matter, including an insightful

foreword by Savall, essays by Monteverdi experts John Whenham and Paolo Fabbri and classicist Montserrat Camps Gaset, photographs of the Barcelona production and pages from Monteverdi's edition of the score (published in 1609).

Savall's conception of this 'musical fable' is boldly kaleidoscopic. Les Concerts des Nations field an enormous group of 12 continuo players, including three keyboardists, four strummers/pluckers (all of whom switch between different types of lute) and four bowed string bass instruments – separate from those who play the bass instruments in the 'orchestra'. The introductory Toccata is unusually shaded in its range of dynamics and flexible pulse, and expressive malleability is also a characteristic of the late Montserrat Figueras's intimate singing of La Musica's prologue. Sara Mingardo's emotive Messenger, Antonio Abete's snarling Charon, Adriana Fernández's meek Proserpina, Daniele Carnovich's compassionate Plutone and Arianna Savall's sorrowful Euridice all make effective short contributions. Furio Zanasi sings the title-role more sweetly than he does on Concerto Italiano's idiosyncratic recording (Naïve, 11/07); his baritone *passaggi* are admirably supple in 'Possente spirito', during which ritornellos are played vibrantly by various instrumentalists. However, on the whole Zanasi's characterisation is somewhat effortful in comparison to tenors whose naturally higher tessitura and eloquent deliveries of Striggio's poetry more fully convey Orfeo's enraptured emotions. The full choral textures used in 'Vieni Imeneo' and 'Lasciate i monti' make polyphonic details seem lugubrious, and to the latter Savall adds recorders and percussion copiously. Similarly, the concluding Moresca sounds like a vivacious crossover between world music and the Italian Renaissance. Savall's ideas may not satisfy everyone, but there's never a hint of formulaic complacency, and this live performance is an engaging alternative view to experience alongside the best studio versions. **David Vickers**



Characters with chaotic relationships: the 18-year-old Mozart's *La finta giardiniera* from Opéra de Lille

Mozart

La finta giardiniera

Erin Morley *sop*..... Sandrina
 Enea Scala *ten*..... Belfiore
 Marie-Adeline Henry *sop*..... Arminda
 Marie-Claude Chappuis *mez*..... Ramiro
 Carlo Allemano *ten*..... Podestà
 Maria Savastano *sop*..... Serpetta
 Nikolay Borchev *bar*..... Nardo
 Le Concert d'Astrée / Emmanuelle Haïm

Stage director David Lescot

Video director Jean-Pierre Loisel

Erato 2564 61664-5; 2564 61664-4
 (176' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i • DD5.1 & PCM stereo •
 O • S). Recorded live at the Opéra de Lille,
 March 22 & 25, 2014



The 18-year-old Mozart's floral romp has been fair game for modern makeovers, most

entertainingly in Doris Dörrie's wacky 2006 Salzburg production set in a garden centre (DG, 3/07). David Lescot's Lille staging is far simpler. The two sets used are almost minimalist: a stylised garden, with tubs of flowers and trees, rows of wheelbarrows or trimmed hedges; then, as the action thickens, an unkempt if hardly threatening

forest. There are some nice comic touches – a giant Venus flytrap to symbolise the upwardly mobile Arminda, ruthlessly bent on becoming a Countess. But Lescot mercifully refrains from 'clever' gags – unlike many of his ilk, he is not afraid of stillness – and from grafting spurious 'interpretation' on to the silly *buffo* intrigue. The characters, all clad in contemporary white costumes, and their chaotic relationships are clearly drawn. Amid the absurdities, the gradual self-discovery and reconciliation of the two central figures, Sandrina, the 'pretend garden-maid' of the title, and her violently unstable lover, Count Belfiore, emerge as true and touching.

All the cast seem natural stage animals and take well to the camera. Among a sprinkling of Italians – always desirable in *opera buffa* – Maria Savastano as the wide-eyed, pocket-sized Serpetta is a delightful comic presence. Singing with bright, focused tone and gleefully dispatching her reams of patter, she has her would-be lover Nardo, played with gusto by Nikolay Borchev, wrapped round her little finger. Marie-Claude Chappuis, perpetually clutching a badminton racket, brings agility and (in her distraught Act 3 aria) passion to the serious music Mozart wrote for the lovelorn Ramiro (Chappuis sang the same

role on René Jacobs's CD recording); and the mannishly dressed, rapier-wielding Marie-Adeline Henry makes a vocally and histrionically formidable Arminda, her over-the-top haughtiness tamed only when she accepts Ramiro as her husband.

Neither the Governor, the rough-voiced Carlo Allemano, nor Enea Scala, incisive but slightly gritty of tone as the Count, is a Mozartian paragon. But Scala vividly charts the Count's progressive transformation from preening foppishness, via his 'mad scene' – a musical and dramatic highlight – to his final remorse and reunion with Sandrina. In the title-role, fast-rising American soprano Erin Morley virtually steals the show, as she should. No shrinking violet, she subtly hints at the vulnerability beneath Sandrina's poise and *savoir faire*, singing with lovely, pellucid tone and movingly realising the terror and despair of her Act 2 scena. Emmanuelle Haïm encourages playing of energy and colour from her period band and works up a fine comic lather in the act finales. While Dörrie's Salzburg production generates more zany fun, there is plenty to savour in this spare, elegant and emotionally truthful staging of an opera which already hints at the future composer of *Figaro*.

Richard Wigmore



Alieva & Antonenko

Verdi • Puccini • Tchaikovsky

Orbelian • Kaunas City Symphony

DINARA ALIEVA, soprano

“a singer who possesses the gift of Heaven” (Montserrat Caballé)

ALEXANDRS ANTONENKO, tenor

“a big, thrilling and beautiful sound” (The Telegraph, London)

CONSTANTINE ORBELIAN, conductor

“the singer’s dream collaborator” (Opera News)

Puumala



Anna Liisa

Helena Juntunen *sop* Anna Liisa

Jorma Hynninen *bar* Kortesus

Tanja Kauppinen *sop* Riikka

Ville Rusanen *bar* Mikko

Sanna Kurki-Suonio *sng* Husso

Juha Hostikka *ten* Johannes

Anu Hostikka *sop* Pirkko

Jouni Kokora *bass-bar* Vicar

Helsinki Chamber Choir; Tapiola Sinfonietta /

Jan Söderblom

Online ② ODE1254-2D (164' • DDD • S/T/t)



There have only been two previous references in these pages to the Finnish composer and teacher Veli-Matti Puumala, 50 this year, one of them as a booklet-note writer for Sallinen string quartets. Puumala studied under Paavo Heininen and Franco Donatoni. *Anna Liisa*, his only opera to date and based on a noted 1895 Finnish play by feminist activist Minna Canth, was premiered at the Helsinki Festival in 2008. A 12-tone work with extensive and formally adventurous ensemble-writing, it has testing contributions from both chorus and orchestra, as well as a large solo part especially conceived for a non-classically trained folk singer.

Before the action begins, the heroine, daughter of a prosperous farmholder, has had an affair with a farmhand and has killed the resulting child, plot elements recognisable from both *Jenöfa* and Strindberg's *Miss Julie*. Anna Liisa – now under pressure from both that farmhand Mikko and his mother Husso (the folk singer role) to formalize this past relationship and to abandon her plans to marry Johannes, a more socially respectable fiancé – ignores her parents' fear of social disgrace, confesses all and goes to prison.

Following rather in the footsteps of Berg, Puumala often adapts specific musical forms to distinguish stages of the dramatic action. An extended choral finale to the whole work (Act 3, scene 4d) is formed by a set of variations on early-20th-century collected folk material ('a paraphrase from a modern perspective', says the composer). It both sounds like a kind of dodecaphonic Baroque fugue and, through its scale, confirms the heroine's confession as a courageous convention-rejecting decision on behalf of honesty and her own spiritual freedom. An ensemble of similar virtuosity – more centred this time around the soloists – drives the crisis in Act 2 where Mikko and Husso confront Anna Liisa and

her family with threats about revealing the story of the baby murder. Puumala has also been careful to find individual colours for the soloists, calling for the greatest virtuosity (large intervallic leaps) from Anna Liisa herself when she is most under pressure – rather like the madness of an updated *bel canto* soprano. The composer distinguishes the leading men (Anna Liisa's two lovers and her father) from each other through phrasing as much as through pitch.

This recording from last year feels tight and exciting, no mean achievement for the revival of an evidently difficult score dependent on stage hysteria and tension. Helena Juntunen is outstanding in the title role both vocally and emotionally and Jorma Hynninen makes much of her compromised father. The booklet provides all the essential information and decent, perhaps rather literal translations. *Anna Liisa* is something special and deserves wide circulation outside its native land. **Mike Ashman**

Ravel

L'enfant et les sortilèges^a.

Shéhérazade^b. Alborada del gracioso

^aIsabel Leonard *mez* L'Enfant

^aPaul Gay *bass-bar* Le Fauteuil/L'Arbre

^aYvonne Naef *mez* Maman/La Tasse Chinoise/La Libellule

^aAnna Christy *sop* Le Feu/La Princesse/Le Rossignol

^aMarie Lenormand *mez* La Chatte/L'Eclureuil

^aElliot Madore *bar* L'Horloge Comtoise/Le Chat

^aJean-Paul Fouchécourt *ten* Le Théâtre/Le Petit Vieillard/La Rainette

^aKanae Fujitani *sop* La Bergère/La Chauve-souris

^bSusan Graham *mez*

^aSKF Matsumoto Chorus & Children's Chorus;

Saito Kinen Orchestra / Seiji Ozawa

Decca ④ 478 6762DH (73' • DDD • S/T/t)

^aRecorded live at Performing Arts Centre,

Matsumoto, Japan, August 23-31, 2013



This live recording of Ravel's second opera, recorded two years ago, has been issued to mark the 80th birthday of Seiji Ozawa. The multinational cast led by the American Isabel Leonard includes two singers, Paul Gay and Elliot Madore, from the 2012 Glyndebourne production; and Jean-Paul Fouchécourt can also be heard on the Simon Rattle recording from Berlin. Ozawa studied in Paris when he first came to Europe and he is noted for his interpretations of French music. Here he conducts the Saito Kinen Orchestra, which he co-founded in 1984. They play with needle-sharp precision and, where the opportunity presents itself, refined beauty

(the muted strings when the action moves into the garden, for instance, or the solo flute that accompanies the Princess). Perhaps the trumpet in the foxtrot for the Chinese Cup and the Teapot isn't unbuttoned enough; listen to the player on the Ernest Bour recording, who instantly transports you to a louche nightclub in the 1920s.

Isabel Leonard makes a believable Child, from the tantrums at the start to the pity, sympathy and loneliness of the ending. Her warm mezzo comes into its own at 'Toi, le coeur de la rose', where Ravel tips his hat to 'Adieu, notre petite table' in Massenet's *Manon*. Anna Christy's dazzling coloratura as Fire gives way, after the charming number for the shepherds and shepherdesses, to a heartfelt rendering of the Princess's lament. A special bouquet to Marie Lenormand and Elliot Madore as the cats, whose mewing (Môrnâou, Méinhon etc) is particularly accurate. This is a good alternative to the Rattle version; but for the truly authentic touch, right from the phrasing of the opening parallel fifths and fourths on the oboes, you need Ernest Bour.

The other pieces were recorded back in 2009. Susan Graham, like Ozawa, is at home in the French repertoire – who could forget her in *Chérubin* at Covent Garden? – and she is magically sensuous in *Shéhérazade* [see Musician and Score, August issue]. In 'Asie', abetted by Ozawa, she moves from the half-light at the beginning to a terrific climax where the would-be traveller imagines violent death. The two shorter songs that follow are done with a tender, veiled delicacy. A lively *Alborada del gracioso* concludes an enjoyable disc. **Richard Lawrence**

L'enfant et les sortilèges – selected comparisons:

Rad France Nat Orch, Bour (2/95) (TEST) SBT1044

BPO, Rattle (6/09) (EMI) 264197-2

Glyndebourne Op, Ono (11/13) (FRA) DVD FRA008

Schubert



Fierrabras

Michael Schade *ten* Fierrabras

Julia Kleiter *sop* Emma

Georg Zeppenfeld *bass* Charlemagne

Markus Werba *bar* Roland

Benjamin Bernheim *ten* Eginhard

Peter Kálmán *bar* Boland

Dorothea Röschmann *sop* Florinda

Marie-Claude Chappuis *mez* Maragond

Chorus of the Vienna State Opera; Vienna

Philharmonic Orchestra / Ingo Metzmacher

Stage director **Peter Stein**

Video director **Peter Schönhöfer**

C Major Entertainment ④ DVD 730708;

④ 730804 (164' + 10' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i •

DTS-HD MA5.0, DTS5.0 & PCM stereo • 0 • S/s)

Recorded live at the Haus für Mozart, Salzburg,

August 22 & 25, 2014; Bonus: Making of Fierrabras



WELSH
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**Devotion...
Turmoil...
Passion...**

I puritani Bellini
Orlando Handel
Sweeney Todd Sondheim

The Demon Barber of Fleet Street
A Musical Thriller

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Orlando (Scottish Opera cast) photo by Richard Campbell | *Sweeney Todd only



Composed in 1823, when Vienna was in the grip of a Rossini craze, Schubert's last completed opera

remained unperformed in his lifetime and dealt a final blow to his hopes of fame and fortune in the theatre. Josef Kupelwieser's clunky libretto, set amid the struggles between Charlemagne and the Moors, certainly did him no favours. The characters are pasteboard and the action is propelled, often in spoken dialogue, by ludicrous coincidences and ploys such as a cache of weapons conveniently hidden under the floorboards. Schubert – who never had the chance to see what worked on the stage – sometimes writes music that is too *gemütlich* for the situation. The opera's heroic aspirations can be undercut by Singspiel jollity, as in the 'friendship' duet between the noble Moor Fierrabras and the Christian knight Roland (shades here of *Die Zauberflöte*). Yet amid occasional longueurs and incongruities are many moments of ravishing Schubertian lyricism, above all the Italianate duet for Florinda and her maid Maragond, and Eginhard's nocturnal serenade to Emma (Charlemagne's daughter), which turns magically from minor to major as she responds to his wooing. Elsewhere, some of the ensembles – a rather Mozartian quintet in Act 2, a quartet in Act 3 – and the superb Act 1 finale generate real dramatic tension, hinting at the operatic masterpiece Schubert might have achieved given a first-class libretto.

Peter Stein's Salzburg Festival production mercifully eschews a modern – and potentially inflammatory – Western-Islamic *Konzept* and sets *Fierrabras* more or less in its historical period. Drawing on theatrical techniques of the Biedermeier era, he and designer Ferdinand Wögerbauer use gauze backdrops evocative of old engravings to create a series of attractive *tableaux vivants*. Stein never falls in to the trap of livening up the many static choral episodes with gratuitous 'action'. Unpretentious and consistently pleasing on the eye, his staging is a refreshing contrast to so many productions that seek to shock and disconcert with maximum scenic ugliness.

As Stein stresses in an interview on the 'bonus' track, the core of the opera lies in the two pairs of star-crossed lovers: Emma and Eginhard, and the Christian knight Roland and Florinda, daughter of the Moorish prince Boland (no librettist worth his salt could have planted a Boland and

a Roland in the same opera). All four roles are convincingly taken, with the palm going to Julia Kleiter's Emma, alluringly voiced and phrased, and soaring without shrillness into the stratosphere. As Florinda, Dorothea Röschmann compensates for some loss of tonal bloom with her trademark histrionic intensity. Her thrillingly fiery Act 2 solo – one of only two true arias in the opera – rightly elicits a storm of applause.

Benjamin Bernheim, a new name to me, fields an ardent, youthful lyric tenor as the unheroic knight Eginhard, while Markus Werba sings Roland's music with incisive vigour. Fierrabras himself, the Moorish prince who renounces both Emma and his Islamic faith, is portrayed powerfully, if not without strain, by Michael Schade. Peter Kálman rants and blusters effectively as Boland, whose 'rage' aria evokes a Moorish Pizarro; and Georg Zeppenfeld brings a resonant *basso cantante* and benign dignity to the role of Charlemagne.

A word, too, for the contribution of the Vienna State Opera Chorus, both sonorous and sensitive, with some budding Siegfrieds among the tenors. While Ingo Metzmacher's conducting may not be as subtly flexible as Abbado's in his pioneering CD version (DG, 10/90), he evidently believes passionately in Schubert's score, paces it shrewdly and elicits classy playing from the Vienna Philharmonic. Kupelwieser's barely competent dramaturgy will always bar *Fierrabras* from the operatic mainstream. But it is a work of many musical delights, and this vocally strong, visually handsome Salzburg production does it proud.

Richard Wigmore

R Strauss

Der Rosenkavalier

Kate Royal *sop*.....Die Feldmarschallin
Tara Erraught *mez*.....Octavian
Lars Woldt *bass*.....Baron Ochs
Teodora Gheorghiu *sop*.....Sophie
Michael Kraus *ten*.....Faninal
Andrej Dunaev *ten*.....Italian Tenor
Helene Schneiderman *mez*.....Annina
Christopher Gillett *ten*.....Valzacchi
Miranda Keys *sop*.....Leitmetzerin
Gwynne Howell *bass*.....Notary
Robert Worle *ten*.....Innkeeper
Scott Conner *bass*.....Police Commissioner
The Glyndebourne Chorus; London Philharmonic Orchestra / Robin Ticciati

Opus Arte ② DVD OA1170D; ③ OABD7168D
(3h 11' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i • DTS-HD MA5.1,
DTS5.1 & LPCM stereo • O). Recorded live, May 2014
Extra Features: Robin Ticciati - Taking the Baton;
The Trio; Sights and Smells of a Production;
Cast Gallery



So here it is, the *Rosenkavalier* that launched a thousand blog posts. Or not quite, since this DVD was filmed some days after the first night, by which time Glyndebourne had quietly adjusted mezzo Tara Erraught's wig and costume to render them less unflattering. However, her Octavian – or Octavian as presented by Richard Jones's production – remains a problem: she gains some unconvincing sideburns but otherwise never looks anything but unequivocally feminine. There's none of the androgynous quality in her characterisation or appearance, therefore, that Strauss and Hofmannsthal so clearly wanted to play with in their *Komödie für Musik*.

As one would expect from Jones, there's much that is striking in the staging, though, and plenty of interesting ideas and minutely observed details – it's impeccably filmed, too. But the garish brightness of the admittedly often brilliant sets and costumes – taking in stylised references from the Baroque right through to the time of composition and beyond – offers little opportunity for interpretative light and shade. The director, in his desire to avoid sentimentality, renders Hofmannsthal's other subtly drawn characters two-dimensional: Ochs is pure boor, robbed of any residual aristocratic charm; the Marschallin becomes more self-determined than mopey, but is also cold, engaged in just one of a string of unrewarding affairs (the adolescent Mohammed is clearly next on the list); Sophie is little more than a commodity traded for her father's gain. Much of this is in the libretto, I suppose, but it only tells half the story, with the result that it's difficult to care very much about the characters: I've rarely felt so unmoved by the Trio or final duet.

The cast itself doesn't help matters. Kate Royal's Marschallin is sung well enough but the sound is more sinewy than creamy. Erraught sings with bright, soprano-like timbre but Teodora Gheorghiu sounds a little thin as Sophie. Lars Woldt, a lighter bass than we often hear as Ochs, is impressively free and easy in his singing, but he, like the cast in general, doesn't make enough of the words. The LPO play with considerable virtuosity for Robin Ticciati, whose reading is clean and unsentimental. Straussians will no doubt want to see this production, and it certainly engages the brain. Go elsewhere (either Kleiber version, for a start) if you want a *Rosenkavalier* DVD to engage the heart. **Hugo Shirley**

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Wagner

Der Ring des Nibelungen

Thomas Jesatko *bass-bar* Wotan/Wanderer
Edna Prochnik *mez* Fricka/Waltraute
Iris Kupke *sop* Freia
Thomas Berau *bar* Donner/Gunther
Juhan Tralla *ten* Froh
Simone Schröder *contr* Erda
Endrik Wottrich *ten* Siegmund
Heike Wessels *sop* Sieglinde
Jürgen Müller *ten* Siegfried/Loge
Manfred Hemm *bass* Hunding
Cornelia Ptasek *sop* Guttrune
Christoph Stephinger *bass* Hagen
Judith Németh *sop* Brünnhilde
Sung Ha *bass* Fasolt/Fafner (Siegfried)
Andreas Hörl *bass* Fafner (Rheingold)
Karsten Mewes *bar* Alberich
Uwe Eikötter *ten* Mime
Katharina Göres *sop* Woodbird
Chorus and Orchestra of the Mannheim National Theatre / Dan Ettinger

Stage director **Achim Freyer**

Video director **Rudij Bergmann**

ArtHaus Musik ② ⑦ **DVD** 107 553

(14h 19' • NTSC • 16:9 • PCM stereo • 0)

Recorded live, June-July 2013



Obtainable from the usual online sources, this live recording of the cycle from Wagner-year performances in Mannheim in 2013 is not officially available in the UK. But, as the first non-narrative production of the work to make it to DVD, it's a significant release. Artist/designer/director Achim Freyer, a one-time pupil of Bertolt Brecht, takes no prisoners in his depiction of the characters as visual symbols (or, better, signs). Their appearance and interreactions relate little to realistically chartable human emotions – and not at all to a century-plus's worth of tradition – while props are similarly abstract or sometimes absent at moments when, supposedly following the music, more conventional stagings make most use of them. As befits actors in a mythical drama, everyone is either masked or heavily made up. Wotan and Fricka, for example, have black and white cage-like head-dress masks, and there are many clowns: Alberich a Hitler-like one, Siegfried (memorably) a full circus comedian with straw hair, white face, blue eyeliner and scarlet nose and lips, Hagen a ringmaster. Also, perhaps more literally following the motif-laden patchwork of Wagner's score, there are an awful lot of people present on Freyer's stage – if they're in characters' minds, the chances are that you'll see them, whether or not they're already dead or have, according to the libretto, exited.

In best modern-day Brechtian fashion, too, Thomas Mann's idea of *The Ring* as a late-19th-century novel of personal and political intrigue is ditched in total (ditto Shaw's political analogy and its Chéreau updating). Contrary to the intensely physical Bayreuth stagings of the 1970s and '80s, Freyer's characters hardly touch each other, let alone actually sing to each other. Any such contact is made, in stylised form, by the acting doubles, scaled-down models or puppets that double for all the principals. Ideas, however, or atmospheres, can be represented visually: whenever war or turmoil is mentioned a posse of Valkyries with their loaded chariot prams cross the stage; Loge (chain-smoking cigars in five hands) is a constant on-offstage fixture whenever Wotan is plotting in *Walküre*; a long Wotan spear overhangs the action; and the Rhinedaughters act as MCs to each act of *Götterdämmerung* (because they're children of nature who eventually will get their ring back?).

A first version of this staging caused a lot of upset in (operatically conservative) Los Angeles, as well as disturbing some of its principal singers. Here, with a substantially altered set – basically an ever-turning revolve with masses of flying – and perhaps more extreme costumes, the effect of the production throws an uncanny concentration on to Wagner's musical and written text. Intentionally performed devoid of surface emotion, the whole Siegmund/Sieglinde action (superbly achieved by Wottrich and Wessels) is quite heartbreaking. Perhaps the biggest coup of the cycle is the presentation of Siegfried as simple innocent in clownface, the child of nature about which Wagner wrote so much, and a characterisation free of the fascist overtones which have obsessed modern commentators. The simple, almost super-fringe theatre-style stagecraft with which Siegfried (plus double, plus puppet) climbs Brünnhilde's rock and crosses the fire to reach an (at first) superhumanly tall goddess is brilliantly achieved.

The company assembled for Mannheim's new *Ring* evidently have worked attentively to encompass such an unusual and demanding staging, not least the orchestra – who clearly have this score in their blood – and Dan Ettinger, whose carefully balanced transversal of the cycle would surely have earned Wieland Wagner's praise for its lyricism as opposed to unnecessary weight. The cast take on new directions with aplomb, especially Thomas Jesatko's Wotan, Edna Prochnik's Fricka and Waltraute and Jürgen Müller's Siegfried. Note that there are no foreign-language subtitles, only individual acts are banded and that the

filming, while more than adequate, is really just a sophisticated version of the in-house record that companies keep of their work.

Mike Ashman

Wagner

Tannhäuser

Torsten Kerl *ten* Tannhäuser
Camilla Nylund *sop* Elisabeth
Markus Eiche *bar* Wolfram
Michelle Breedt *mez* Venus
Kwangchul Youn *bass* Hermann
Lothar Odinius *ten* Walther
Thomas Jesatko *bass-bar* Biterolf
Stefan Heibach *ten* Heinrich
Rainer Zaun *bass-bar* Reinmar
Katja Stuber *sop* Shepherd
Bayreuth Festival Chorus and Orchestra / Axel Kober

Stage director **Sebastian Baumgarten**

Video director **Christopher Kondek**

Opus Arte ② **DVD** OA1177D; ⑦ **OABD7171D**

(4h 12' + 40' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i • DTS-HD MA5.1, DTS5.1 & LPCM stereo • 0 • S/s)

Recorded live, August 12, 2014. Extra features:

Artist interviews; Short films; Cast gallery



Bayreuth's 2011 *Tannhäuser* project – here offered in a live relay from the festival last summer –

got off to a frustrating start when the chosen conductor Thomas Hengelbrock was unable to continue his period-style work with the orchestra. Nonetheless, although Axel Kober is now the production's third conductor, intriguing musical differences – especially around the Venusberg music, Venus herself and the shepherd boy's May greeting – suggest that Bayreuth is still working from Wagner's 1845 handwritten score. After-echoes of Hengelbrock's experiment still seem present in the Italianate lyricism of the Act 2 Elisabeth/Tannhäuser duet and the French feel of the Entry of the Guests chorus.

Tannhäuser, not the easiest opera in the repertoire to cast, is handsomely sung here. Following in the footsteps of the role's creator Josef Tichatschek, Torsten Kerl puts his *Rienzi* experience to good use as the frustrated minstrel, ending with a suitably tortured reading of the Rome Narration. His women are powerful – only the very end of Venus's part is a little high for Michelle Breedt – and (for once) powerfully contrasted. Camilla Nylund's Elisabeth has a range of novel emotions to convey, including humour and sexual interest. The fellow Wartburg minstrels, especially Markus Eiche's Wolfram, are



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pretty ideal. And we mustn't forget Katja Stuber's drunken Shepherd, here given so much more to act than normal.

Question marks begin with the staging. The opera is all set on an installation by Dutch artist Joep van Lieshout representing an eco-factory recycling human waste into food and (mostly, it appears) drink. It is maintained (and over-frequently polished) by the citizens of the Wartburg, a *Zauberflöte*-like working community whose Sarastro is a decidedly fierce Landgraf. Their actions – which include a sung Eucharist before Act 3 (booed on this occasion!) – are visible throughout the intervals.

Up from the middle of the floor comes a large circular cage in which hippie-like primitives and dancing sperms (yes, really) enact a faded Bacchic sexual ritual. The geography is kind of fine; the relevance of the eco-plant (whatever Wagner's occasionally vegetarian beliefs) and its control, or not, of its citizens escapes me. Act 2 – where at last someone has fun with the pretensions and ceremony of the singing contest – has its moments, but too much of the outer acts presents a conventional production in 21st-century clothes struggling with the factory environment. The final image, as the chorus pass round and celebrate Venus's newly born baby (don't ask) and Elisabeth returns from the gas oven (ditto) to be hymned by all, is one of over-imaginative confusion. **Mike Ashman**

Wolf-Ferrari

Die neugierigen Frauen

Agnete Rasmussen *sop.*.....Rosaura
Viktorija Kaminskaite *sop.*.....Colombina
Violetta Radomirska *sop.*.....Eleonora
Kathrin Göring *mez.*.....Beatrice
Andreas Weller *ten.*.....Florindo
Jörg Schörner *ten.*.....Leandro
Kay Stieffermann *bar.*.....Pantalone
Peter Schöne *bar.*.....Lelio
Jürgen Linn *bass.*.....Ottavio
Hans Christoph Begemann *bass.*.....Arlecchino

Members of the Madrigal Choir of the

Hochschule für Musik und Theater, Munich;

Munich Radio Orchestra / Ulf Schirmer

CPO     CPO777 739-2 (117' • DDD • S/T/t)

Recorded live at the Prinzregententheater, Munich, October 9, 2011



First performed in Munich in 1903, *Die neugierigen Frauen* – *Le donne curiose* to give

it its original title – was the work that put its half-German, half-Italian composer on the musical map, though he was also, to

some extent, to be constrained by its legacy. It was the first of the sequence of retro comedies that made Wolf-Ferrari successful in his lifetime, though his public repeatedly threatened to desert him whenever he deviated from the form. He originally offered the piece to Venice, which rejected it. Munich, however, accepted it on the proviso it be staged in German: at Wolf-Ferrari's insistence, the premieres of many of his subsequent operas to Italian texts were given in German, even if the actual translations were not his own.

It was also his first of several operas based on the work of Carlo Goldoni. The inquisitive women of the title are a group of Venetian wives who are anxious to discover what their husbands are up to at the men-only club they have founded for themselves. Aristocratic Eleonora thinks her husband Lelio is practising alchemy. Bourgeois Beatrice is concerned Ottavio might be unfaithful. *Commedia dell'arte* blends with social comedy: Pantalone is one of the club's founders; Arlecchino, his servant, is conniving with Colombina, Beatrice's maid, to get the women in. The sexual politics might nowadays raise eyebrows – Wolf-Ferrari is on the side of the men, whose secret pleasure, it turns out, is gastronomy – but the score is engaging. Wolf-Ferrari's through-composed *buffa* is reminiscent of *Falstaff*, albeit without the latter's poignancy.

Very much an ensemble piece, it's difficult to cast in today's world of star singers, though this new recording, a 2011 radio production from Munich's Prinzregententheater, serves it rather nicely. Ulf Schirmer's conducting is impeccably stylish. The vocal honours belong to Violetta Radomirska's imperious Eleonora and Peter Schöne's maddeningly obtuse Lelio, the pair stealing the limelight from Kathrin Göring's plummy Beatrice and Jürgen Linn, occasionally unsteady, as bluff Ottavio. Agnete Rasmussen and Andreas Weller, as the Nannetta-and-Fenton-ish young lovers, Rosaura and Florindo, have great charm, while Hans Christoph Begemann's Arlecchino sounds as raffish and sexy as one could wish. **Tim Ashley**

'Ténor tenore!'

Adam *Le postillon de Lonjumeau* – Mes amis, écoutez l'histoire **Bizet** *Carmen* – La fleur que tu m'avais jetée; Intermezzo **Donizetti** *L'elisir d'amore* – Una furtiva lagrima. La fille du régiment – Ah! mes amis **Gounod** *Faust* – Quel trouble inconnu... Salut! demeure chaste et pure. Roméo et Juliette – L'amour, l'amour...Ah! lève-toi, soleil! **Massenet** *Manon* – Je suis seul...Ah! fuyez, douce image.

Werther – Pourquoi me réveiller **Puccini** *La bohème* – Che gelida manina! **Manon Lescaut** – Act 3, Intermezzo. **Tosca** – E lucevan le stelle; **Recondita armonia**. **Turandot** – Nessun dorma **Verdi** *Aida* – Celeste Aida. Un ballo in maschera – Forse la soglia attinse. **Rigoletto** – La donna è mobile. *La traviata* – Prelude

Yinjia Gong *ten*

Lahti Symphony Orchestra / Markus Lehtinen

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The young Chinese-born, Swedish-trained tenor Yinjia Gong finished his formal

studies just three years ago. For him to be able to encompass, on this disc of French and Italian arias, numbers stretching from Tonio's top C-laden 'Ah! mes amis' and the similarly amiable 'Mes amis, écoutez l'histoire' from Adam's *Le postillon de Lonjumeau* (taking him up to a top D) through to such heavyweight fare as 'Nessun dorma' is mightily impressive.

The range is in part inspired by the two Swedish tenors Gong has, the booklet tells us, always admired, Nicolai Gedda and Jussi Björling. To evoke those names, however, is to invite cruel comparisons. Gong's voice, essentially lyrical in timbre, has a clean, ringing power to it, and he sings securely right through the range. At the moment, though, he employs a one-size-fits-all, slightly stentorian approach that, well, isn't really an entirely ideal fit for anything here. There's no smile in 'La donna è mobile', the Donizetti or the Adam – listen to Gedda to hear what's missing in the latter, or even Juan Diego Flórez's recent French recital (Decca, 6/14). Gong remains emotionally blank as Don José's Flower Song starts to get hot under the collar (from 2'20"), although he does offer nice quietish B flats at the end of that aria and Roméo's 'Ah! lève-toi, soleil!' – that at the close of the dutiful 'Celeste Aida' doesn't work quite as well to my ears.

The tenor is currently a member of the ensemble at Theater Regensburg, and he will no doubt prove enormously useful there, where he will also have a chance to let his interpretations develop away from the limelight. Luminously recorded and featuring fine playing from the Lahti Symphony Orchestra under Markus Lehtinen, however, this disc seems to be less about the finished article than this singer's potential. **Hugo Shirley**

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Seefried gems

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Of the German soprano **Irmgard Seefried**, a much-loved stalwart at the Vienna State Opera from the early 1940s through to the mid-1970s, Elisabeth Schwarzkopf famously observed: 'All of us envied her, because what we had to achieve laboriously worked for her so naturally and as a matter of course, because she knew how to sing from the heart.' However, listening through to this often revealing set of 11 Seefried CDs on DG Eloquence reveals a significant curve of artistic development, where 'singing from the heart' often, but not always, becomes more apparent with the passing of time. Two Schubert Lieder, both with Erik Werba at the piano (the principal accompanist throughout the series), are significant cases in point. The first, 'Ave Maria' (1952; in Vol 4, an all-Lieder recital) is a seraphic performance, innocent and memorably pure in tone. But turn to the stereo remake of the same song (1958; Vol 5, all Schubert), and note the candid attack on the first note, the varieties of articulation and vibrato, and the uncanny sense that the words are fully understood. The first version is beautiful, the second less youthful, admittedly, but more profoundly meaningful. An even better comparison is between the early and later recordings of 'Der König in Thule', who on the death of his fair one received a golden goblet, which was never out of his sight. Listen how in the first version (sung at a higher pitch and at a slower tempo overall) Seefried unfolds the narrative in the simplest terms. In 1958, the singing is so much more subtle and expressive, the significantly broadened last stanza overwhelming in its impact.

The highlights of Vol 1 are by Mozart (excerpts from *Figaro* and *Don Giovanni* under Fricsay, and from *Il re pastore* and the concert aria *Non temer, amato bene*, both featuring Seefried's husband, violinist Wolfgang Schneiderhan, under Leitner). It's great to have Respighi's gorgeous *Il tramonto* as a bonus. More arias fill

Vol 2, more Mozart too, starting with 'Prenderò quell brunettino' (*Così fan tutte*) under Jochum. Superb Weber, Thomas and Lortzing are followed by a generous *Rosenkavalier* sequence with Kurt Böhme, Marianne Schech, Rita Streich and Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, the conductor Karl Böhm (the same recording of the complete opera is also out on Eloquence 480 7202). Mozart Lieder feature on the Vol 3, most memorably 'Das Veilchen', 'An Chloe' and 'Abendempfindung'. Mussorgsky's 'The Nursery' and Bartók's *Village Scenes* (both sung in German) are chock-full of character. Peter Cornelius's *Weihnachtslieder* and the Schubert sequence referred to above are among the most notable items on Vol 4.

The later Schubert recordings fill Vol 5 (including the wonderful *Lieder der Mignon*, D877). Brahms dominates Vols 6 (with a Schumann sequence) and 7 (*Deutsche Volkslieder* and the two sets of *Liebeslieder Waltzes* with Raili Kostia, Waldemar Kmentt and Eberhard Waechter), while Hugo Wolf is the main focus of Vols 8 (with a fine selection of Strauss Lieder), 9 (with Hindemith and Reger) and 10 (with Werner Egk's *Quattro canzoni*, where the composer himself conducts the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra). The final volume (11) opens with Bach's 'Wedding' Cantata *Weichet nur, betrübte Schatten* (No 202), proceeds through a series of extracts taken from Karl Richter's first Munich recording of the *St Matthew Passion* and ends with items excerpted from Haydn's *Creation* and Gounod's *St Cecilia* Mass, both conducted by Igor Markevitch.

Glorious singing throughout, as well as a wealth of interpretative variety and a level of artistic integrity that distinguished Seefried as one of a small but select band of master musicians of her era. And great as this series is, it's good to have the individual programmes issued as single CDs so the discerning listener can pick and choose according to taste. The transfers from tape are immaculate.

THE RECORDINGS



The Art of Irmgard Seefried

Vol 1: Arias

DG Eloquence ④ 480 7227



The Art of Irmgard Seefried

Vol 2: Arias

DG Eloquence ④ 480 7228



The Art of Irmgard Seefried

Vol 3: Lieder

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Vol 4: Lieder

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Vol 5: Schubert

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The Art of Irmgard Seefried

Vol 7: Brahms

DG Eloquence ④ 480 7233



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Vol 8: Wolf, Strauss

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Vol 9: Wolf, Hindemith, Reger

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Vol 10: Wolf, Egk

DG Eloquence ④ 480 7236



The Art of Irmgard Seefried

Vol 11: Sacred Arias

DG Eloquence ④ 480 7237



'Glorious singing': Irmgard Seefried, here recording Werner Egk's Quattro canzoni, conducted by the composer

Discovering Fontanarosa

Violinist **Patrice Fontanarosa** was born to distinguished painter parents in Paris in 1942 but his image on the CD market here in the UK is, as of the present time, distinctly low-profile. Hopefully French Decca's 12-disc 'Portraits' collection will change all that. My first sampling from this admirable artist's work was a fairly ascetic-sounding Sibelius Concerto, bright and airborne if hardly exceptional. But a coupling of Schumann's Violin Concerto and Fantasy is in a different league entirely, impulsive, impassioned, tonally ripe and, in the case of the Fantasy, making real substance where many others merely skate across the surface. Trio performances with Fontanarosa's pianist sister Frédérique and cellist brother Renaud are hardly less remarkable, the two Schubert trios granted a generous roster of repeats, the playing strongly communicative, Frédérique very much a first among equals. Trios by Ravel and Fauré are also extremely fine, though the former suffers patches of compromised sound quality. It should be noted that although most of these recordings date from the early to mid-1970s, the original mastertapes were unusable due to technical faults, which meant recourse to vinyl pressings. Most of them are unblemished, though you can certainly tell when what you're hearing is from tape, ie the last three CDs: concertos by Beethoven, Brahms, Mendelssohn and Tchaikovsky filling two of them, the Tchaikovsky particularly lovely, with a magical *diminuendo* run just beyond the end of the first-movement cadenza (disc 11, tr 4, 12'49"). My favourite disc in the set brings together Mozart's Third

Concerto and *Sinfonia concertante*, K364 (with viola player Bruno Pasquier) – the two slow movements granted performances that it would be difficult to match, let alone surpass – and the violin version of Bach's Keyboard Concerto BWV1052. Of the numerous shorter works included, among the most effective are on the last CD, where Fontanarosa is accompanied by guitarist Michel Dintrich. The programme includes three real scorers, Granados's *Andaluza*, Sarasate's *Romanza andaluza* and Corelli's *La folia*. Various orchestras and conductors are involved throughout the set, none of them out of the ordinary but more than adequate for the purposes of supporting a player who at his best shows himself to be a remarkable talent. Think in terms of a cross between Arthur Grumiaux and Toscha Seidel and you'll have a pretty good idea of what to expect. It's worth noting that Fontanarosa CDs are also available from Profil and EMI. Warmly recommended.

THE RECORDING



Patrice Fontanarosa: Portraits
Decca/Discovery © 12 481 1195

Mravinsky revisited

Melodiya's 'Yevgeny Mravinsky Special Edition' features as its 'rarity' highlight a trim, swiftly paced and consistently urgent Beethoven *Pastoral* from the late 1940s. The throbbing basses in the 'Storm' are especially memorable and the exposition repeat is observed. I thought at first that

Mozart's Symphony No 39 ('recorded 1950', or so we're told) would be as interesting but it turns out to be the well-known stereo version. As to the rest, we have the familiar stereo DG tapes of Tchaikovsky Symphonies Nos 4 and 5, plus *The Swan of Tuonela*, *Prélude à L'après-midi d'un faune*, Bruckner's Ninth, Stravinsky's *Apollo*, *Boléro*, *Poem of Ecstasy*, *La mer* and *Capriccio italien*. Good to have again of course, all of it musically rewarding, and yet with early Wagner recordings and extracts from the *Sleeping Beauty* and *Nutcracker* ballets that have still haven't appeared within these shores, why revisit material that we already know? Someone at Melodiya ought to plan a systematic series featuring every extant commercial Mravinsky recording, just as RCA did for Toscanini.

THE RECORDING



Yevgeny Mravinsky
Special Edition

Melodiya © 5 MELCD100 2295

Beethoven from Russia

A chance encounter with **Rudolf Barshai's** Russian recordings of Beethoven's purely orchestral symphonies, reissued as a box and now available from Select, reminded me of just how gifted this fine conductor was. The Fourth is especially memorable, the first movement's development fleet and unbending, just as it should be, while the Seventh's first movement approximates in its weight and rhythmic precision the youthful Klemperer. In the *Pastoral* (so much more relaxed than Mravinsky's), note the perfectly gauged *diminuendo* at the close of the exposition – vividly drawn dynamics are a big feature throughout the set – and I loved the *Eroica's* leisurely first movement, the way it builds patiently and with a sense of inevitability, not to mention the gravitas of the 'Marcia funebre'. All first-movement exposition repeats are played, and every note of each work has been carefully pondered, fitted into context as if as part of a giant jigsaw. Barshai's architectural approach, allied to invariably warm playing, offers a very special slant on the music, and the sound is for the most part extremely good, if just occasionally 'edgy'. Recommended. **G**

THE RECORDING



Beethoven

Symphonies Nos 1-8

Barshai

Melodiya © 5 MELCD100 2228

Books



Philip Clark sees an opportunity missed in Raines's conversations:

'All composers, whether they approve or not, are operating inside an environment utterly transformed by digital technology'



Richard Osborne relishes Thielemann's Wagner study:

'Thielemann has been imbibing Wagner since he was a child in rompers in Berlin in the 1960s'

Composition in the Digital World

'Conversations with 21st-Century American Composers'

By Robert Raines

OUP, HB, 354pp, £25.99. ISBN 978-0-19-935703-1



Robert Raines has chosen his title carefully. *Composition in the Digital World* gives him plenty of

wiggle-room to smudge the parameters of his book because, in reality, composed music no longer exists in an analogue world. All composers, whether they approve or not, are operating inside an environment utterly transformed by digital technology; and so Raines's title might as well have read 'Composition in Today's World' – or simply 'Conversations With 21st-Century American Composers'.

Raines is a New York City-based composer and guitarist who has performed as a jazz musician and 'now composes full time and has written for theatre and film in addition to concert music'. His book is structured as a sequence of transcribed conversations with some of America's senior composers – Steve Reich, Ellen Taaffe Zwilich, Jennifer Higdon, Michael Daugherty, Glenn Branca, Aaron J Kernis – and some lesser known figures – Mohammed Fairouz, José Beviá, Daniel Wohl, R Luke DuBois. And Raines takes full advantage of the scope his title allows. This is emphatically not a primer aimed at informing readers about the latest studio gizmos available to composers and sound artists. Input/output diagrams and directions about which buttons to press are noticeable by their absence. No, Raines is concerned with digital technology in a more existentialist sense. Technology and 'the Internet' (this is 2015 – do we still need the capital I?) allows composers, especially those who feel marginalised by symphony orchestras and other conventionally constituted institutions, a chance to realise

their music then distribute it electronically. Premieres can just be a mouse-click away. The impact of social media and the role composers' websites can play (or not) as a tool to spread their compositional messages is also part of this ongoing story.

But nothing presses the case more, in my humble opinion, for through-written text – where ideas have the space to be fully examined and interviews are put into context and edited – than books of conversations where the focus never quite feels fully centred. Raines, sadly, falls into all the traps. Bright Sheng's reminiscences about his mentor Leonard Bernstein belong in another book; and Steve Reich is allowed to reiterate verbatim his oft-repeated anecdote about studying with Berio (the story that ends 'Well, if you want to write tonal music, why don't you write tonal music?').

Meanwhile, Raines's Introduction defaults to a broadly populist, off-the-shelf view of modern composition's current directions. By the second paragraph, he's already talking up audiences 'reclaiming' the concert hall; then turn the page and the inevitable paragraph looms about the 'stranglehold' of 12-tone music during the 1950s and '60s. The message is simple. Today's composers are free to write the music they want, while, back in the day, serial dogma was a monstrous, suffocating carbuncle, an argument that soon enough falls apart when hit with a dose of the obvious. An era that can produce Maxwell Davies, Cage, Tippett, Kagel, Bernd Alois Zimmermann, Glass, Ligeti, Andriessen, Lachenmann, Birtwistle, Lou Harrison and Xenakis is intrinsically more open-minded and tolerant than today's too often homogenised, corporate new-music slumber.

It's true, a two-way dialogue between pop and classical culture has become absolutely embedded inside our cultural thinking. No longer is it an aesthetic stretch to think of music in these terms. But this is where Raines properly runs into trouble. Electric guitars, amplification, tape and digital modification are all part

of the modern composer's toolkit, but you wonder why he fails to pose that most fundamental question of all – how has digital technology changed composers' perceptions of sound and structure?

Asking Michael Torke and Eric Whitacre about how hands-on they are with their website design is, I submit, a wasted opportunity. Reich and R Luke DuBois discuss the functionality of MIDI as a tool for producing mock-ups of compositions in progress. And fair enough. But Raines's failure to mention SuperCollider, the coding system designed to lead composers down previously untrodden pathways of algorithmic composition and real-time audio synthesis, feels inexplicable – like a book about bebop that would omit Charlie Parker. For a while, SuperCollider (other systems too, like Ableton) felt like the only story in town, with composers as varied as Mattias Petersson, Robin Fox, Mark Fell, Anthony Braxton and Florian Hecker falling under its grip. The true heart of the digital revolution – music that actually does something new in sound. **Philip Clark**

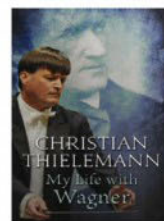
My Life with Wagner

By Christian Thielemann

(translated by Anthea Bell)

Weidenfeld & Nicolson, HB, 320pp, £25

ISBN 978-0-297-60855-4



It is always cheering, where one of the mastodons of the musical forest is concerned, to be able to say to someone, 'Take this book.

The man was a monster and the work is immense but here in about 300 pages is an intellectually engaging and superbly well-informed overview of the entire shooting-match.' Kurt Blaukopf's *Mahler* was one such book; Christian Thielemann's misleadingly titled *My Life with Wagner* (autobiography it is not) is another.

Thielemann has been imbibing Wagner since he was a child in rompers in Berlin in



Christian Thielemann shares his wealth of Wagnerian wisdom, built up from his long experience of the music in the pit

Lortzing, many of whose works were played well into the 1950s. That loss of repertory is disappointing, says Thielemann, whose own background is nothing if not (in Sachs's phrase) 'deutsch und echt'. 'It cannot be said too often,' Thielemann avers, 'that without knowing about Lortzing's *Zar und Zimmermann*, we cannot really understand *Die Meistersinger*.'

Where stage direction is concerned, he mentions with approbation Ruth Berghaus, Götz Friedrich and Jean-Pierre Ponnelle but confines his remarks on Hans Neuenfels's rat-infested Bayreuth *Lobengrin*, which he himself conducted, to an acknowledgement of its 'cult status'. He clearly has worries about the 'the *Regie* heresy', as Rupert Christiansen recently dubbed it. Thielemann writes of 'cast-iron aesthetics involving gigantic theoretical superstructures, extremely complicated stage sets and much chatter in the media'. The fact that many stage directors appear incapable of handling relations between characters troubles him deeply.

This summer at Bayreuth he is conducting *Tristan* for the first

time in 13 years. His one-word summary of *Tristan* is 'intensity' – 'an intensity of emotion that cannot be lived out in reality'. Three of the book's four passages of close analysis come from *Tristan*, an opera, he warns, which can be ruined at its very outset if the playing of the Prelude is dull or overheated. It's like safe-cracking. 'Either you set off the alarm or you find the right combination of numbers.'

Pacing greatly concerns him. Was Toscanini's notoriously protracted Bayreuth *Parsifal* due to his unfamiliarity with the language? A conductor who does not have German, says Thielemann, will always be at a disadvantage where Wagner is concerned. In *Parsifal* Knappertsbusch is his ideal. 'He developed a way of chiselling out the climaxes of the music, yet proceeding at a good pace.'

Whatever your own take on Wagner, there is much to learn from this treasure-trove of recorded thoughts which Thielemann's gifted collaborator Christine Lemke-Matwey has magicked into a fully functioning book.

Richard Osborne

the 1960s. Fifty years on, few people know more about Wagner, and from so many angles, as he. After its autobiographical preamble, the book falls into two 100-page sections. In the first, we read about Wagner the man, his ideologies and methods, as well as Bayreuth itself, both as a political dynasty and as a strange yet strangely rewarding house in which to make music.

There is also much about conducting ('analysis first then interpretation'), though Thielemann's trawl through Bayreuth's rogues' gallery of conductors is disarmingly hit-and-miss. He admits ignorance of Victor de Sabata (a legendary *Tristan* interpreter who profoundly influenced Karajan's 1952 Bayreuth *Tristan*, which Thielemann so admires) and omits Karl Böhm altogether. Happily Böhm appears several pages later, conducting with his feet in bowls of cooling water in defiance of the covered pit's soaring summer temperature.

The book's second half is an insider's guide to the operas, each provided with a bespoke entry on its origins, its casting and orchestration, plot, music, and Thielemann's own private take on its recorded history.

Thielemann sees Wagner as a craftsman-poet, a real-life Hans Sachs, albeit a good deal less agreeable personally. Sachs faces facts and avoids misfortune; in every other opera, says Thielemann, 'someone turns up – a fantasist, a purist, a man possessed, an artist if you will – and everything goes wrong'. Wagner, he suggests, is a Jekyll and Hyde figure. 'One side of his personality sees visions and staggers from one insanely somnambulist state to the next, the other constructs and refines, mixes and discards ideas, simmers and tastes. It is part of his genius that each side knows about the other.'

In Wagner the word is the procreating seed, the music the element which brings it forth. From this and similar premises flow Thielemann's many insights into Wagner's shifting sound worlds and treatment of the human voice. Given that Wagner considered this 'the foundation of all music', he could be desperately cruel to singers.

Writing of the early operas, Thielemann is keen to stress Wagner's debt to composers such as Marschner and

Classics RECONSIDERED



Critics **Rob Cowan** and **Duncan Druce** reassess RCA's 1961 recording of Mendelssohn's Octet with its spectacular line-up of top-notch players including Heifetz and Piatigorsky



Mendelssohn

Octet in E flat, Op 20

Jascha Heifetz, Israel Baker, Arnold Belnick, Joseph Stepansky *vs* **William Primrose, Virginia Majewski** *va* **Gregor Piatigorsky, Gabor Rejto** *vc*

Sony Classical © (103 discs) 88697 70050-2

(Recorded in the RCA Studios, Hollywood, Los Angeles on August 24 & 25, 1961)

Heifetz and Piatigorsky, the ultra-violet and infra-red of this brilliant musical spectrum, have gathered around them a magnificent group of players some of whose names are already well known to connoisseurs.

After years of making do with ensembles with a weak member here or there, waiting for exposed passages in octaves that never sound quite in tune, it is sheer relief to listen to and enjoy performances that are technically as perfect as possible, musically as sincere as one could wish for. Inevitably, the tonal personalities of Heifetz and Piatigorsky dominate the scene, but anyone who thinks the other players are passengers should try the *Scherzo*, surely one of the trickiest pieces of music to synchronise and balance in the entire chamber music repertoire. Mendelssohn wrote it with his

violin teacher in mind, and the concerto-like first violin part in Heifetz's hands loses no time in getting into orbit.

For sheer breathtaking brilliance, utter ease and naturalness of phrasing, and magical control of timbre, this performance is unique and unrivalled. I guarantee that when you have played it once, you will not believe your ears and will want to start right again at the beginning. Mono or stereo, beg, borrow, or better still buy, for there has never been anything like this before in recorded chamber music.

Denis Stevens (11/62)

Rob Cowan 'I guarantee that when you have played it once, you will not believe your ears and will want to start right again at the beginning...' Those words of Denis Stevens, taken from the original *Gramophone* review (see above), are forever embossed on my memory. So is Stevens's advice at the foot of his review, eagerly absorbed by an impressionable 14-year-old: 'Mono or stereo, beg, borrow, or better still buy, for there has never been anything like this before in recorded chamber music.' So, that was my family Christmas present sorted then! Nostalgia? Absolutely not. János Starker once railed at me because of *Gramophone*'s one-time negativity towards leading American artists, singling out Heifetz and Fritz Reiner as specific victims. I should have quoted Stevens. These Heifetz-Piatigorsky concerts have flown untarnished through countless reissues, on LP and CD, emerging not only as technically brilliant but as the very epitome of musical refinement. Then as now (on CD), the Octet came coupled with an equally sublime – and equally dynamic – Mozart G minor Quintet. What most strikes me is the blend of drama and sweetness, inflections that can twist or turn in a millisecond, countless

varieties of vibrato, and heightened dynamics. Heifetz and his team cram more expressive intensity into a single phrase than many others manage for a whole performance. They rarely relax. Too much to communicate for that.

Duncan Druce I remember reading negative comments about Heifetz in the 1950s – not just in *Gramophone* – to the effect that, though supreme on a technical level, his playing was somehow cold, and failed to get to the heart of the music. I couldn't understand then, as a teenager, how these writers could miss the passion and imagination that inspired me. I'd first been alerted to Heifetz's qualities as a chamber music player hearing the records of Beethoven string trios with Primrose and Piatigorsky, before coming across the Mendelssohn Octet. One thing that's perhaps not expected in the great soloist is that he never seeks to dominate the proceedings. Yes, he has all the power to sing out above the other seven players, for example in the first movement's coda, but for the most part he blends with the ensemble, allowing others to take the limelight when it's their turn. Indeed, I find

the whole performance remarkable for its fine internal balance; passages which can often sound congested coming over with absolute clarity...

RC ...and the consistency of it! A murky-sounding reel-to-reel tape of the live concerts has long circulated in the nether regions of the record aficionado's 'underground' and although greatly lacking in detail the concert performance is as remarkable. And just think: back in the 1960s playing the first-movement exposition repeat was pretty unusual (ditto in the case of the Mozart G minor Quintet). And that top E flat that leads into it – dead in the centre of the note. Another thrilling episode is the breakneck start of the closing *presto*. Even after 50 years or more, that excited bustle takes my breath away – first we hear cello 2, then cello 1, viola 2, viola 1, and the four violins, starting from the bottom up, all going at it like greased lightning. And just when you think that we've already broken the sound barrier, in flies Heifetz, leaping forth like a demon possessed...except that, as you suggest, he still manages to be a first among equals. But wasn't that ever the case? The greater



The Octet recording session: Jascha Heifetz sits far left, Gregor Piatigorsky is third from right

the musician, the more willingly he or she gives way to colleagues as and when they need to take a cue. Those falling cadences in the *Andante* have surely never wept more meaningfully and, as you say, clarity and balance are among the performance's most prominent virtues.

DD I share your excitement about the lead-back to the first-movement exposition repeat, and the start of the finale. But I wonder what your reaction is to the faster-than-usual speeds taken in all four movements? I confess that, coming back to this performance after several years, I was taken aback by the opening – it's *Allegro moderato*, after all. But Mendelssohn adds *ma con fuoco* (there's certainly plenty of fire here) and we know he generally favoured fast tempos. Anyway, I soon got used to it, swept along by the flow. And the *Andante*, taken at a true classical walking speed, sounding so much more touching than in weightier performances. The garlands of *staccato* triplets have a feather-like character, the effect the composer surely intended. With the *Scherzo*, one feels that the only reason some ensembles play this piece more slowly is a technical one – this group is completely sure of its ability to achieve the necessary delicacy and

precision. The nonchalant way Heifetz tosses off the extremely awkward passage with trills is almost unbelievable!

RC 'The faster than usual speeds taken in all four movements'... Well, yes, they are, but after being flown sky-high by Heifetz and friends I chanced upon another marvellous recording, made two years earlier (June 1959 for Westminster), by the combined Janáček and Smetana Quartets who, incidentally, also play that first-movement repeat. It's interesting to compare timings. Heifetz: 12'41", 5'32", 4'15" and 5'19"; the Janáček and Smetanas: 15'01", 8'12", 4'46" and 6'05". As ever, timings are instructive rather than a fail-safe explanation. It's almost as if the Czechs have been sitting by while the Russians self-combust, then sagely take to the stage with the words, 'OK. That was marvellous... but, please, my friends, just a little more repose.' Right from the off their articulation is memorably subtle, with rich internal textures, phrasing that breathes (though that lacerating E flat hasn't the same tingle factor that it has with Heifetz), the *Andante* – where the differences with Heifetz are most marked – more like a song without words albeit just a little stolid. But passion? Forwards momentum? Not so much. Their *Scherzo* is more elegant than scintillating (those shivery demisemiquavers

are clearer than on the Heifetz version) but I have to admit that after Heifetz, the finale, for all its musical virtues, just doesn't cut the mustard. I quote the Janáček/Smetana recording simply because for me it's the next best thing. But the gulf is still there, and for a recording to strike me like a bolt out of the blue even after all these years – for musical rather than for visceral reasons – is some accolade.

DD Your comparison with the Janáček/Smetana recording is an instructive one, showing that after all there's another way of treating the music, and in particular that the *Andante* can sound beautiful with a very different approach. Hearing Heifetz and Co again, it strikes me that many present-day instrumentalists might learn from studying the performance, especially so as to appreciate the value of subtlety. Too often, I feel, we hear heavy underlining of expressive points, through big *tenutos* or obvious tempo changes. But listen to the way Heifetz and colleagues emphasise the climaxes in the finale with a slight broadening that could almost be a spontaneous response; it sounds so natural and yet makes the effect with real power. And thinking of the finale especially, I feel a special word of admiration is due to Israel Baker, the second violinist. Every player in the ensemble distinguishes him- or herself in their moments of prominence, but Baker has the task of matching Heifetz in the frequent passages where the two top violin parts hold a dialogue. In the last-movement coda, during the first violin's final burst of *moto perpetuo* quavers, he leads the ensemble in the most expressive way, ensuring that the contrasting liveliness and lyricism stay in focus right to the end.

RC I suppose the lesson to be learned here is to sidestep dogmatic assessments and listen with fresh ears. As I suggested in my opening gambit, ill-considered critical clichés have too often hampered Heifetz's reputation as a musician, even in the light of overwhelming evidence to the contrary. Both as a man and as a musician he prized self-discipline, a refusal to underline expressive points 'through big *tenutos* or obvious tempo changes', as you say. He didn't need to. He and his hand-picked colleagues had the wherewithal to shine a spotlight on everything they played so that you didn't miss a trick and yet you were rarely aware that that was what they were actually doing. I thought of wheeling out the old 'less is more' paradox, except that in this context, 'less' doesn't really come into it! **G**

THE SPECIALIST'S GUIDE TO...

British folksong in classical music

From Taverner to Tippett, composers over many centuries have appropriated elements of British folksong into their compositions. **Alexandra Coghlan** offers a guide to the most convincing examples on record

When we speak of folksong in classical music what are we actually talking about? Is it the authentic, original melodies sung so roughly into Edison phonographs by willing rustics, or is the artful translation of these melodies for the concert hall – rough edges smoothed, architectural balance imposed?

For Percy Grainger, champion and pioneer of the British folksong movement, the answer was clear. 'It is obvious that all music lovers,' he writes, 'loathe genuine folksong. Yet these same music lovers are delighted when they chance upon half-breed tunes like *Country Gardens* that they can sentimentalise over (as being folksongs) yet can listen to without suffering the

intense boredom aroused in them by genuine folksongs.'

It's the paradox inherent to classical music's relationship with folksong – a search for authenticity, for a shared original musical simplicity, that is only truly satisfied by the artful simulation rather than the genuine article. Yet brushing the mud off folksongs for society's consumption was by no means a new phenomenon in the 20th century. We have only to look at courtly dances and songs – even the Masses from the Renaissance – to see this same process at work.

What's perhaps most interesting, however, is the variety of methods and approaches classical composers have taken in their treatment of their folk sources.

Arrangements vary from the doggedly faithful to the intricately reimagined, while symphonic music has cut away text from melody and distilled folksongs down to an altogether more abstract essence. Most recently, works such as Birtwistle's *Down by the Greenwood Side* – absent here for the unaccountable lack of a commercial recording – do away with actual folksongs altogether, retaining only the idea of them in music that reinvents pastoral for a cynical, urban age.

Spanning four centuries, the following selection aims to give some sense of the evolution of British folksong in classical music – a touchstone for changing musical fashions and social philosophies alike. **G**

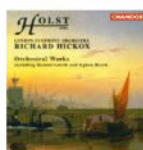


Ralph Vaughan Williams (left) with Percy Grainger (centre) at the Diamond Jubilee of the English Folk Dance and Song Society at Cecil Sharp House, London, in 1958

PHOTOGRAPHY: HERITAGE IMAGE PARTNERSHIP LTD/ALAMY

**Delius: Brigg Fair**Hallé Orchestra /
John BarbirolliEMI Ⓢ 565119-2 (2/71^R)Subtitled *An English Rhapsody*,

Delius's *Brigg Fair* is an extended arrangement of a tune that was discovered as a direct result of Percy Grainger's 1905 competition to find 'the best unpublished old Lincolnshire folk song or plough song'. Although it was not the winner, this particular song pleased Grainger so much that, after arranging it himself, he persuaded Delius to write orchestral variations on it. Classic Barbirolli richness brings a pleasing weight to this performance.

**Holst:*****A Somerset Rhapsody***

London Symphony

Orchestra / Richard Hickox

Chandos Ⓢ CHAN9420 (4/96)

Holst himself never collected folksongs, but he arranged those gathered by colleagues and friends. Less familiar than Vaughan Williams's two Norfolk rhapsodies, *A Somerset Rhapsody* weaves songs collected by Cecil Sharp – the *Sheep Shearing Song*, *High Germany* and *The True Lover's Farewell* – into a brief orchestral tone-poem about a young man carried off to war away from his beloved. Hickox once again shows his deep affection and affinity for this repertoire.

**Gay, arr. Britten:**
The Beggar's Opera

Sols incl Tom Randle,

Susan Bickley; City of London

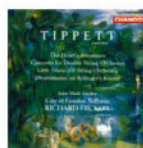
Sinfonia / Christian Curnyn

Chandos Ⓢ ② CHAN10548 (11/09)

Intended as a satire on the affectations of Italian opera, John Gay's work created a new vernacular genre in its own right: ballad opera. Created collage-like from pre-existing music, it set popular folksongs alongside classical works – elevating the former as much as debasing the latter. Britten wrote that these melodies 'are often strangely like Purcell and Handel'. This recording of his arrangement has a strong cast of soloists.

**Vaughan Williams:**
Fantasia on GreensleevesAcademy of St Martin in the
Fields / Neville MarrinerDecca Ⓢ 414 595-2 (10/72^R)

Although the legend persists that Henry VIII composed *Greensleeves* during his courtship of Anne Boleyn, there is little evidence to support this attractive story. Whatever its origins, the melody remains hugely popular, in no small part owing to Vaughan Williams's lyrical arrangement – pairing the tune with *Lovely Joan*, a folksong Vaughan Williams himself collected. This classic recording resists any urge to sentimentality, letting the music generate its own romance.

**Tippett: Divertimento**
on Sellinger's RoundCity of London Sinfonia /
Richard Hickox

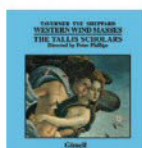
Chandos Ⓢ CHAN9409 (3/96)

A folksong at double remove, Tippett's work is an arrangement of Byrd's own arrangement of the popular Elizabethan dance. The work began life as a single movement – Tippett's contribution to Britten's *Variations on an Elizabethan Theme* project. Tippett later expanded his variation, exploring the folk melody in five contrasting movements. More expressive than Marriner's fine recording, Hickox is at his best in the slow movements, finding greater emotional scope.

**Britten: English Folk Song**
ArrangementsPeter Pears *ten*Benjamin Britten *pf*

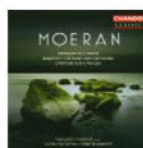
Decca Eloquence Ⓢ 467 2362

'Now, more than ever,' wrote Britten in 1942, 'nationalism is an anachronistic irrelevance.' But despite the composer's suspicious distance from the composers of the 'folksong school', he too engaged with folk music on his own terms, generating several volumes of delicately interventionist arrangements. Pears and Britten bring unequalled intimacy to performances of works originally devised as concert encores for the pair.

**Taverner:**
Western Wynde MassThe Tallis Scholars /
Peter Phillips

Gimell Ⓢ CDGIM027 (9/93)

Taking a secular melody as the basis for a sacred work was common among European composers of the Renaissance but, until John Taverner's *Western Wynde Mass*, was unknown in England. The result is an unusually unified work, its folk theme recurring nine times in each movement – a *cantus firmus* heard first in the upper voices, before moving down to contratenor or bass. The Tallis Scholars bring a welcome architectural clarity to this fine work.

**Moeran:*****Symphony in G minor***Ulster Orchestra /
Vernon Handley

Chandos Ⓢ

CHAN10169X(5/04)

Conjuring the misty marshlands of Norfolk, the *Lento*'s central motif has been connected to the folksong *The Shooting of his Dear*, previously arranged by Moeran himself – a poignant, if indirect, reference to the violent losses of the First World War. The ebb and flow Handley draws here from the Ulster Orchestra foregrounds the unsettled anxiety that pervades this neglected masterpiece.

**Beethoven:**
Folksong Settings

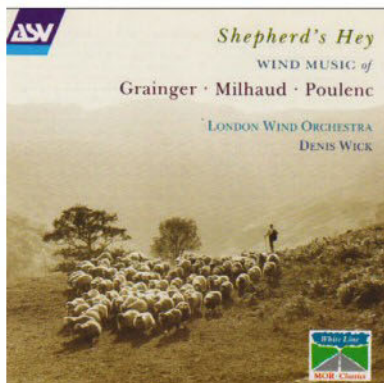
Sols incl Ruby Philogene,

Christopher Maltman with

Malcolm Martineau *pf*

DG Ⓢ ⑦ 477 5128

Folksong arrangements form the largest body of music produced by Beethoven, who composed almost 180 of these between 1809 and 1820. The majority are British – a quirk explained by George Thomson, a Scotsman determined to create the greatest collection of national melodies. Beethoven was commissioned, and the results are ingenious classical reframings of traditional melodies.

**Shepherd's Hey**

WIND MUSIC of

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LONDON WIND ORCHESTRA
DENIS WICK**Grainger: Lincolnshire Posy**

London Wind Orchestra / Denis Wick

ASV White Line Ⓢ CDWHL2067 (5/79^R)

Percy Grainger's *Lincolnshire Posy* – a 'bunch of musical wild flowers' – is unique among folksong arrangements of the time for its ambitious dual aim. Grainger sought not only to preserve these traditional songs, but also to offer a musical portrait of their original singers, the folk-musicians from whom he notated them. The results are vivid, from the

rakish and lurching counterpoint of *Rufford Park Poachers* to the stately and grandiose treatment of *The Lost Lady Found*.

Grainger's unusual instrumentation – the work is scored originally for wind band – finds a rusticity and directness that shines out in the London Wind Orchestra's unfussy recording with Denis Wick.

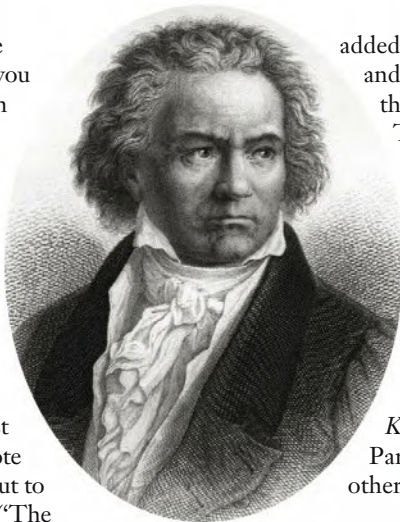
THE GRAMOPHONE COLLECTION

Beethoven's Diabelli Variations, Op 120

Perhaps no pianist can fully do it justice but, as **Jed Distler** reveals, this large-scale, complex, technically challenging and stylistically eclectic masterpiece can withstand disparate treatments on record

You couldn't ignore Anton Diabelli if you were involved with music in Vienna in the early 19th century. He was a man about town, whose serious compositions and teaching pieces held sway, not to mention his success as a music publisher and his promotional savvy. In 1819 he launched his most celebrated project: he wrote a short waltz and sent it out to more than 50 composers ('The Foremost Tone Poets and Virtuosi of Vienna and the Austrian States') requesting that each compose a variation. The combined variations then would be published by Diabelli's firm under the rather pompous title *Vaterländischer Künstlerverein*. Among the composers approached were Schubert, Hummel, Archduke Rudolph, one of Mozart's sons, Czerny, a young boy named Franz Liszt, and, of course, Beethoven.

Legend states that Beethoven dismissed the waltz as a *Schusterfleck* (literally a cobbler's patch), then turned down Diabelli's proposal, offering instead a small group of variations for a price. Whether or not that's true, the fact is that Beethoven began writing variation after variation, completing 23 of them by the summer of 1819. He set them aside for a few years,

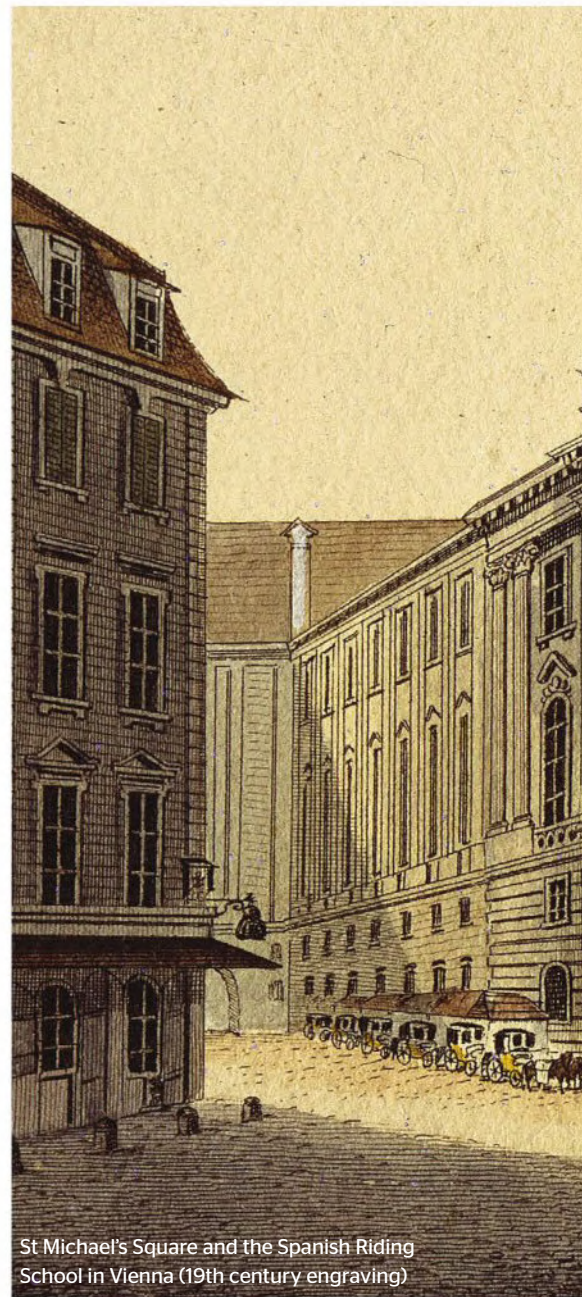


added a few more variations, and eventually completed the work by early 1823.

The end result must have taken Diabelli by surprise. But the wily publisher was no fool, and he eventually brought out Beethoven's 33 variations as Part One of his *Vaterländischer Künstlerverein*, with Part Two comprising the other composers' variations.

INTERPRETATIVE APPROACHES

Because of the set's great length and wide range of techniques, from outright parody and raving virtuosity to contrapuntal rigour and spacious lyricism, Beethoven's *Diabelli Variations* are as challenging for a performer to hold together as they are for a listener to absorb the music's deceptively complex architecture and uncompromising time scale. My late colleague Harris Goldsmith's description of three basic interpretative approaches on disc certainly applies to this article's selected recordings, and to the work's vast discography at large. Certain interpreters strive for a cumulative emotional effect by building drama and momentum within larger groups of variations. By contrast, some pianists aim to give each variation its own particular voice, treating



St Michael's Square and the Spanish Riding School in Vienna (19th century engraving)

them as separate structural or intellectual entities. Then there are those who primarily concern themselves with pianism per se and the work's potential for virtuosic scintillation and surface excitement.

In many respects, the cumulative approach is the most difficult yet most rewarding of the three, and finds a still-persuasive advocate in **Artur Schnabel** in the first ever recording of the piece. Schnabel achieves a powerful fusion of the music's structural and spiritual characteristics. His work abounds with inflection and nuance, yet is never indulgent, and is always musically clear – even when he takes rhythmic licence in the name of harmonic clarification, as in Variation No 28; or establishes a dangerous precedent by slowing down No 20's *Andante* to



a time-stopping *adagio*. Notice both the precision and the simplicity with which Schnabel articulates Variation No 2's alternating chords (oddly, he adds a gratuitous repeat to the first 16 bars), or how No 6's pearly trills and No 10's effortless élan reveal a more accomplished and flexible technique than the pianist is often credited for. Furthermore, Schnabel's vocal eloquence and astute timing of the minor key Nos 29, 30 and 31 may have been equalled, yet they've never quite been surpassed on disc.

Schnabel's espousal of textual fidelity influenced both **Claudio Arrau** and **Rudolf Serkin**, who often prove more scrupulous than Schnabel in this regard, though Arrau's full-bodied timbre and ruminative breadth markedly contrast with

Serkin's gaunt, ascetic tone and kinetic drive. Although critics took issue with the 'aeroplane-hanger' engineering of Arrau's recording back in the day, it nevertheless gives an idea of how Arrau's rich sonority penetrated and congealed in a concert hall. His meticulous voice-leading and intelligently modulated *legato* articulation abound with ravishing tracery and sustaining power.

Serkin (1957) lacks comparable delicacy, yet his more angular and combative pianism is alive to every startling *subito* dynamic, harmonic surprise, rhythmic quirk and transition. Furthermore, Serkin was at the apex of his considerable, hard-won technical powers, although the blinding virtuosity he brings to Nos 23, 25 and 28, for example, puts the music ahead of the instrument. And

don't forget the famous Vermont cricket chirping away in the minor-key variations! That said, the rugged contours and flinty edges defining Serkin's studio recordings take on more complex sonorous manifestations in the live 1969 BBC transmission from the Royal Festival Hall (available on Spotify).

YOUTHFUL EXUBERANCE

The 1950s and '60s saw a younger generation of *Diabelli* Variations contenders jostle for position, including the tragically short-lived **Julius Katchen**. A 1953 recording finds the pianist in generally less hectic, more thoughtful fettle when measured alongside his unbridled, unabashedly virtuosic 1960 remake (download only) that I've always jokingly referred to as the 'Oscar Peterson Diabellis'. However, the 1953

version's constricted dynamics, inconsistent accents and phrase shapes borne out of pianistic expediency still add up to a pretty glib show.

By contrast, **Alfred Brendel's** earnest demeanour and serious intent ripened over the four decades spanning his four commercially released versions. He himself favours the May 30, 2001 Royal Festival Hall live performance over the other three. Certainly, it's the most spontaneous and unified, notwithstanding a few telltale signs of waning energy, such as in No 5's dotted rhythms, and the flagging momentum between Nos 16 and 17 that emerges with more élan and vitality in his live 1976 Philips recording (nla) from the same venue. In 2001, Brendel gauged No 13's silences with more humorous aplomb, and achieved greater contrast between No 21's *Allegro con brio* and *Meno allegro* sections by not overbuilding the latter. Yet the warmer sound and note-perfection of his 1988 studio version pays comparable interpretative dividends.

In 2012, Brendel's former student **Paul Lewis's** technical finish and coloristic resources are never in doubt, yet disengagement sometimes lurks behind his mastery. Notice, for example, his sluggish, almost uniformly even and tensionless dispatch of No 2's broken chords, the square and uneventful Nos 11 and 12 (which Brendel lovingly shapes) and a speedy No 9 that is neither *pesante* nor *risoluto*. In No 10, Lewis takes the chords on bar 56's last beat and bar 57's downbeat up an octave, and generally sacrifices ferocity for speed.

The 21-year-old **Stephen Kovacevich** performed the variations at his highly acclaimed 1961 Wigmore Hall debut and recorded it for Philips seven years later. One might find his studied precision a shade slick or emotionally detached, yet the music's dramatic arc and dynamism assiduously reveal themselves as the performance unfolds. The controlled fury that Kovacevich unleashes in the No 32 fugue gently transitions into the concluding *menuetto*, leaving the awestruck listener to decompress. But who knew that



Diabelli: a 'man about town' in the early 1800s



Schnabel: the first to record the Diabellis in 1937

the pianist would subsequently unleash an altogether gutsier, looser-knit and expressively enhanced remake? His risk-taking recording for Onyx in 2008 reveals an even greater sense of colour, dynamic contrast and nervous energy – and the engineering is exemplary.

SOME LIKE TO LIVE DANGEROUSLY

When the young **Daniel Barenboim** first brought the Diabelli *Variations* into the studio, he chose to record the composition more or less as a live-in-the-studio performance, with few (if any) splices, letting the blemishes fall where they may. He shines in Nos 26-32, where his sense of rapture and continuity proves most palpable. One wonders if Barenboim again opted for minimum editorial interference in his 1981 DG remake: No 6's poor trills, a less-than-solid No 10, No 16's smeared phrasing and an alternately hesitant and hectic fugue in No 32 make my point. However, he was on better technical form 10 years later for Erato, living no less dangerously, and hurling himself into Beethoven's maelstrom of ideas, stressing the composer's quick-change dynamics and cryptic rhythmic displacements with febrile intensity. The slower variations have become grander in design yet more calmly sustained. Yet, as in all of his other versions, Barenboim's tone turns clangorous during the music's loud stretches, and he pounds away at the climaxes without allowing them to resonate.

With **Maurizio Pollini** being the dean of modern pianism, it's not surprising that much of his Beethoven represents a kind of gold standard. Yet *Gramophone* critic David Fanning found his Op 120 disappointing, describing the pianist's opening section as if it were 'determined to engrave an Urtext', and the 'mystic gateway' of No 20 as delivered with 'distressing literalism'. Sadly, I concur. The unfettered swagger and lyric flexibility that I recall from Pollini's live *Diabellis* has been purged under the studio microphone's scrutiny. It's akin to a sleek contemporary dwelling designed by a sophisticated architect, with no occupants allowed. If only we could graft Barenboim's musical instincts onto Pollini's technique.

It's ironic how **Vladimir Ashkenazy's** retreat from public piano performances has coincided with some of his most ambitious studio efforts behind the keyboard in years. His version of Op 120 reveals a more forthright and sharply contoured Beethoven style than in the past: check out

HISTORIC CHOICE

Rudolf Serkin BBC Legends ⑤ ➔ BBCL4211-2 In concert, Serkin's peculiar, difficult-to-record sonority and blinding intensity projected across the footlights and grabbed listeners



by the scruff, no matter where they were sitting. His uncompromising conception is here preserved to more three-dimensional effect than it is in the studio.

ICONOCLASTIC CHOICE

Olli Mustonen RCA ⑤ ➔ 74321 61448-2 Mustonen knocks this work off its cerebral pedestal and looks Beethoven's sardonic wit and rabble-rousing rhythmic mischief



squarely in the eye. Articulation can be exaggerated, and liberal *rubato* threatens to run amok, yet cannily unified tempos and transitions reveal a great deal.

PERIOD-INSTRUMENT CHOICE

Andreas Staier Harmonia Mundi ⑤ HMC90 2091

For all of its carefully considered details, Staier's performance mirrors Beethoven's white-heat



sense of inspiration, replete with spontaneous flourishes and whimsical changes of voicing on the repeats. Staier both enjoys and transcends his own virtuosity.

his vivid No 10, his blazing No 32 fugue and the impeccable trills in Nos 6 and 16. The slower movements are brisker than usual, yet carry plenty of expressive weight. Certain musical gaffes sit less well: inconsistent accents and a few unsteady rhythms in No 1's stern march; the pianist leans into No 9's downbeats rather than the upbeats, and inexplicably clips the final variation's first chord and No 23's opening bang. Still and all, there's much to admire.

Ashkenazy's Beethoven recordings directly influenced the young pianist **Stewart Goodyear**, although the latter's Op 120 (like his earlier, justly acclaimed complete Beethoven sonata cycle) lean stylistically and spiritually closer to the gaunt, leonine Schnabel-Serkin-Shure-Lipkin axis. Following a bracing statement of the theme, Goodyear plunges head first into the first variation's march, digging into its *maestoso* character for all it's worth. He keeps No 2 rock steady, yet generates tension by subtly altering the left-hand voicings; affectionately leans into No 3's three-note upbeat; assiduously links up Nos 4-8; and imparts uncommon presence to No 14's bass-register chords whose gravitas justifies the pianist's fast(ish) tempo. Given his fiery fugue, Goodyear oddly holds No 23 back, and doesn't quite 'swing' as expected in No 15 – but these are trivial quibbles in light of a formidable achievement.

DISAPPOINTMENT, BUT NOT FOR LONG

The last paragraph of Keith Powers's booklet-notes for **Melvin Chen's** Bridge recording describes the interpretation as 'fearless, eager for the extremes available in the score, yet rigorously true to the original'. Not to my ears. Chen's prim, foursquare delivery of the waltz theme hints at things to come, from the pedantic, non-swinging No 7 to a No 21 in which Chen barely differentiates the alternating *Allegro con brio* and *Meno allegro* tempos. He underplays No 23's big chords, and uniformly dispatches No 28's two-note 'loud-soft' phrases in drum-machine fashion. Fortunately, Bridge still offers pianist-scholar **Michael Oelbaum's** captivating 1985 recording, complete with an endorsement on the cover from Murray Perahia praising his 'attention to voice-leading, structure and line'. Perahia must have had Oelbaum's extra emphasis of No 5's canonic entrances in mind, or No 24's beautifully parsed *fugato*. Nos 16 and 17 may not fly like the wind, yet somehow they generate energy and organic build. I also like the extra doses of *rubato* in many repeats, and the perfectly judged slowing down from No 29 to No 31.

If Oelbaum made other solo recordings, I'm not aware of them, whereas



Pensive: the tragically short-lived Julius Katchen

Sviatoslav Richter's discography seemingly never ends. At 71, his conception of the *Diabelli* Variations lacked nothing in power and projection (the assured fingerwork in Nos 10 and 23, for instance), yet he sometimes miscalculated timings between variations. He glides through No 31's aching expressive filigree as if looking at Leonardo's drawings while riding a golf cart. Still, the tactile specificity of

Richter's hypnotic *legato* ultimately seduces you. I'm baffled as to why he approved the June 17, 1986 performance first issued by Philips, with its foully ill-tuned piano. The May 18, 1986 Prague version is musically similar, is almost as well recorded, and benefits from a piano that behaves itself.

PERIOD PERFORMANCES

Collectors seeking a fortepiano version have fewer options. **Jörg Demus's** pioneering 1971 recording features an attractive 1839 Graf instrument, but an uneven performance. The *maestoso* No 1 marches with a bum leg, No 6's trills are not congruent and the demanding Nos 15, 16 and 17 get by on a wind and a prayer, although Demus lets No 23 truly rip.

Cushioned behind a gorgeously engineered and well-preserved 1822 vintage Anton Walter instrument, **Gary Cooper** is basically asleep at the wheel. He treads gingerly through the theme, slightly overshoots No 1's *maestoso* directive and zaps the life and tension out of Nos 3 and 11. Cooper's subtle accentuations create an appropriate phase-shifting effect throughout No 2's alternating-hands patterns, yet No 11 rarely has sounded so tensionless and prosaic, No 13's

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

DATE / ARTISTS	RECORD COMPANY (REVIEW DATE)
1937 Artur Schnabel	Naxos (B) 8 110765
1952 Claudio Arrau	Archipon (B) ➔ ARC-WU143
1953 Julius Katchen	Decca (B) 478 1727DC
1957 Rudolf Serkin	Sony (S) (11) 88691 98830-2
1963 Alfred Brendel	Alto (S) ALC1194; Vox (S) (2) CDX5112; Brilliant (S) (5) 93183; (S) (23 discs) 94430
1965 Daniel Barenboim	Westminster (F) 471 203-2GWM (7/66*)
1968 Stephen Kovacevich	Philips (S) (6) 478 6452DC6 (1/69* 8/90*)
1969 Rudolf Serkin	BBC Legends (F) ➔ BBCL4211-2 (8/07)
1971 Jörg Demus	DG Eloquence (F) (2) ELQ480 3303
1973 Rudolf Buchbinder	Teldec (S) (15) 2564 66074-5 (10/73*)
1981 Daniel Barenboim	DG (S) (8) 453 733-2GCB8
1985 Michael Oelbaum	Bridge (F) BCD9010
1986 Sviatoslav Richter	Decca (S) (51 discs) 478 6778DC51
1986 Sviatoslav Richter	Praga Digitals (F) (S) PRD/DSD350 061
1988 Alfred Brendel	Philips (F) 426 232-2PH (8/90)
1991 Daniel Barenboim	Elatius (S) (2) 2564 60010-2 (8/94*)
1999 Olli Mustonen	RCA (F) ➔ 74321 61448-2 (7/99)
2000 Maurizio Pollini	DG (F) 459 645-2GH (1/01)
2001 Alfred Brendel	Decca (S) (2) 475 8322DX2 (12/07)
2005 Edmund Battersby	Naxos (B) (2) 8 557384/5
2005 Daniel Shapiro	Azica (F) AZICA71234
2006 Melvyn Chen	Bridge (F) BRIDGE9189
2007 Vladimir Ashkenazy	Decca (F) ➔ 475 8401DH; (S) (50 discs) 478 5093 (10/07)
2007 Diane Walsh	Jonathan Digital Recordings (F) JDR1006
2008 Stephen Kovacevich	Onyx (M) ONYX4035 (1/09)
2011 Gary Cooper	Channel Classics (F) (S) CCSSA29110 (6/11)
2012 Paul Lewis	Harmonia Mundi (F) HMC90 2071 (8/11)
2012 Andreas Staier	Harmonia Mundi (F) HMC90 2091 (8/12)
2013 András Schiff	ECM New Series (S) (2) 481 0446 (12/13)
2014 Stewart Goodyear	Marquis (F) MAR455

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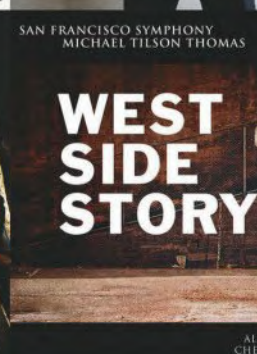
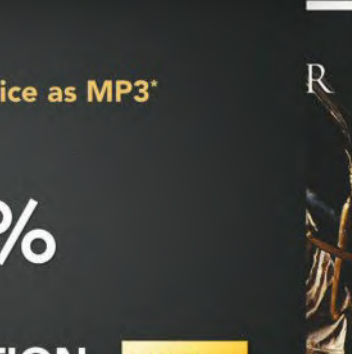
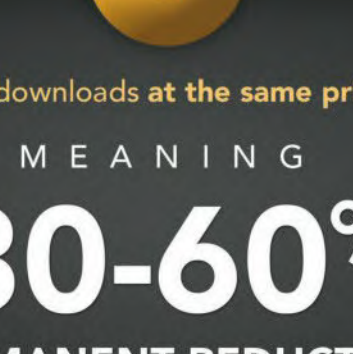
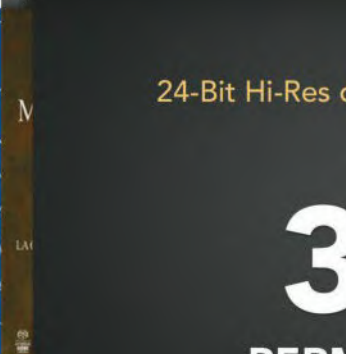
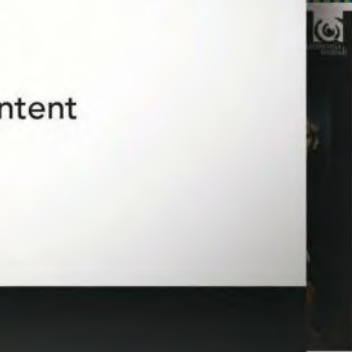
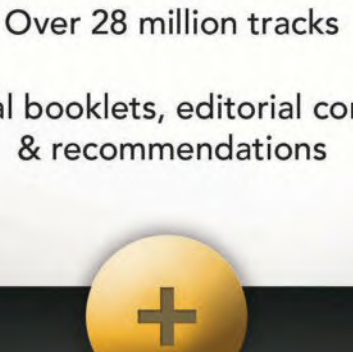
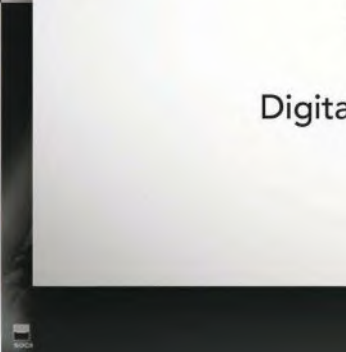
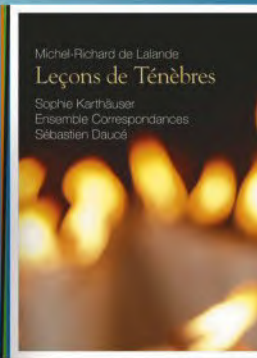
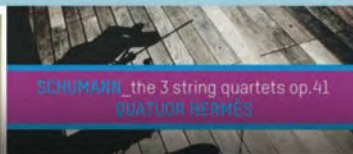
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'A cogent method to his madness': Olli Mustonen tackles Beethoven's Diabelli Variations for RCA

elongations of rests suffer from poor comic timing and No 18 comes off sounding fragmented and clunky rather than lyrical and graceful. In fairness, Cooper's Op 126 Bagatelles coupling fares much better.

Edmund Battersby (2005) and **András Schiff** (2013) each offers a release featuring back-to-back period- and modern-instrument recordings. Battersby's 1824 Graf replica boasts sharp registral differentiation and tactile immediacy, made all the more noticeable via the pianist's effective use of pedallings that would sound relatively blurred on a modern concert grand. Bass-lines convey a pungent, bassoon-like bite (notice the unusual melodic clarity binding No 16's relentless broken octaves) while the twangy sonority Battersby achieves in long sustained chords (in the *Andante* Variation No 20, for example) intensifies the music's harmonic surprises. Certain sluggish details prove more incisive in Battersby's Steinway counterparts, although dry, matter-of-fact readings of the slow variations ultimately lessen both versions' appeal.

Schiff's two versions were recorded on a 1921 Bechstein and an original Viennese Franz Brodmann *Hammerflügel* from around 1820. Some details come off better on the Brodmann, such as No 16's broken octaves, while No 15's three-note phrases speak more smoothly on the Bechstein. If Schiff's contrapuntal mastery blurs the line between astute and fussy, no barrier exists between intention and execution in the pianist's authoritative and individual conception. Like Daniel-Ben Pienaar, Schiff is fond of desynchronising his hands and rolling chords, albeit not to the former's mannered extremes.

As of this writing, the best period-instrument Op 120 on disc belongs to



Kovacevich: 'gutsy and expressive' in 2008

Andreas Staier, who imparts an individual voice to each variation without losing sight of the big picture. Every note vibrates with purpose and meaning: he makes No 4's ricocheting rhythms deliciously buoyant, and he is one of the few pianists who unambiguously nails No 9's often vaguely articulated accents. Staier takes advantage of his instrument's built-in percussion effects, for example with the 'hits' in No 22 (the parody on Mozart's 'Notte e giorno faticar' from *Don Giovanni*). The cymbal crash underlining No 23's big chords arguably distracts from the scampering runs that follow. But who cares? It's an appropriately irreverent and theatrical gesture. The final five variations prove that Staier is as commanding a dramatist as he is a humorist.

AND NOT FORGETTING...

Space precludes a truly comprehensive discussion of Op 120 on record, yet I'd be

remiss to sidestep American pianists **Daniel Shapiro** and **Diane Walsh**, or the Bruno Monsiegeon film on Medici Arts documenting **Piotr Anderszewski's** overly worked-out, utterly absorbing studio recording. Then there's **Rudolf Buchbinder's** important premiere recording that encompasses the entire *Vaterländischer Künstlerverein*. And three important practitioners are absent from the catalogue: extract the best qualities from all of the 1950s recordings into one version, shake well, and you get Paul Baumgartner's deeply gratifying early 1950s reading (Deutsche Grammophon LPM18054, nla) that's still awaiting its first reissue. What Virgil Thomson liked to call 'the discipline of spontaneity' applies to both of Peter Serkin's versions, especially his late 1980s Pro-Arte remake. And should Charles Rosen's graceful, intelligent and warmly engineered 1977 recording (Carlton Classics, 2/96, nla) resurface, it will surely claim its reference position anew in my book.

Avoid the wilful, pulled-about and frankly bizarre versions by Anatol Ugorski (1996, DG) and Christina Björkøe (2015, Danacord). The latter's 72-minute total duration may be a world record for a work that generally spans anywhere from 44 to 59 minutes. Both Yvonne Lefébure recordings respectively clock in at around 31 minutes – because she plays only five out of the 56 repeats! However, there's a cogent method to **Olli Mustonen's** madness (his RCA recording is available on Qobuz), as you'll see when perusing my top choices.

Perhaps no single pianist can meet the *Diabelli Variations'* many challenges with equal, unambiguous success. At the same time, the work easily absorbs a multitude of disparate yet valid approaches. Within their chosen interpretative parameters, the four pianists I've singled out as choices are able to realise their conceptions in sound, hold the listener's attention and communicate what makes Beethoven tick. Pressed to choose just one, I select Kovacevich's splendidly engineered 2008 Onyx release, where his seasoned yet fearless mastery reveals something new with each hearing. **G**

TOP CHOICE

Stephen Kovacevich Onyx **ONX4035**
Kovacevich brings more colour, dynamic variety, characterful diversity and nervous energy to the music than in his early



recording, and is not afraid to take both technical and musical risks in order to achieve maximum expressive impact, abetted by robust, impactive sonics.

PLAYLISTS

Explore music via our themed listening suggestions – and why not create your own too?

Birmingham Conservatoire's new Principal Julian Lloyd Webber on the city's music, composer Jocekyne Pook on works that conjure memories and Rebecca Schmid on JS Bach celebrated in music.

Birmingham in music

Julian Lloyd Webber chooses tracks linked to musical life in Birmingham

As home to two of the world's finest concert halls – Symphony Hall and Town Hall – the city has witnessed many first performances including Dvořák's Requiem, Mendelssohn's *Elijah* and Elgar's *The Dream of Gerontius*. The Conservatoire began life as the Birmingham School of Music and it was Elgar who suggested Granville Bantock as its first Principal. I much enjoyed recording Bantock's Straussian *Sapphic Poem* for cello and orchestra for Hyperion with Vernon Handley who has also recorded Bantock's sumptuous *Omar Khayyám*, included here.

Albert W Ketèlbey was a Birmingham-born composer who enjoyed huge success with such picturesque miniatures as *In a Chinese Temple Garden*. Birmingham's orchestra has long been a jewel in the city's musical crown and the recording of Malcolm Arnold's Fifth Symphony conducted by the composer himself is one of my favourites.

The arrival of Rattle as the CBSO's Principal Conductor created a musical partnership which has become the stuff of legend. His *Turangalila-Symphonie* is particularly fine. His successors, Oramo and Nelsons, have also made many superb recordings with the orchestra. And last year the Conservatoire's own Chamber Choir produced an outstanding recording of choral music by my godfather, Herbert Howells.

- **Mendelssohn** *Elijah*
Soloists; LSC; LSO / Richard Hickox
Chandos
- **Dvořák** *Requiem*
Soloists; Ambrosian Singers; LSO / István Kertész
Decca
- **Elgar** *The Dream of Gerontius*
Soloists; CBSO / Simon Rattle
EMI/Warner Classics



In his playlist Julian Lloyd Webber celebrates Birmingham, where he's the new Principal of the Conservatoire

- **Bantock** *Omar Khayyám*
BBC SO and Chorus / Vernon Handley
Chandos
- **Ketèlbey** *In a Chinese Temple Garden*
Orchestra (unnamed) / Albert Ketèlbey
Naxos
- **Arnold** *Symphony No 5*
CBSO / Malcolm Arnold
EMI/Warner Classics
- **Messiaen** *Turangalila-symphonie*
CBSO / Simon Rattle
Warner Classics
- **Sibelius** *Symphonies*
CBSO / Sakari Oramo
Erato
- **Tchaikovsky** *Violin Concerto*
Baiba Skride vn CBSO / Andris Nelsons
Sony Classical
- **Howells** *Choral works*
Birmingham Conservatoire Chamber Choir
/ Paul Spicer
Somm

Music and memory

Jocelyn Pook selects music that takes her back to a specific time and place

Late-night solitary listening is my favourite way to experience and appreciate music. I find that I have a different mood late at night; my senses are heightened and I'm more reflective and receptive. Music often reminds me of certain times or places throughout my life, for example the

Fado recordings take me back to Portugal the summer I met my husband, and Philip Glass's *Glassworks* reminds me of a scorching hot summer in New York when I was in my twenties.

The Bach Double Violin Concerto is something I've played and heard so many times – it reminds me of my times as a student whilst busking in Paris, and I never tire of hearing it. Similarly, Beethoven's String Quartet No 15 takes me back to my time at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama. My teacher David Takeno had summer music courses where we were encouraged to get into small chamber groups. We used to play through the night – it was such a wonderful way to discover the extensive repertoire of chamber music.

I worked with Andreas Scholl for the *Merchant of Venice* film. I remember him recording my piece 'How Sweet the Moonlight' and thinking that his voice sounded like melted butter – it was astonishingly beautiful. His recording of 'I am a poor wayfaring stranger' is equally breathtaking and takes me back to this moment. Visit jocelynpook.com

- **Madredeus** *Existir - O pastor*
Madredeus
Parlophone Portugal
- **'Fado's Archives, Vol 3'** *Fado Estoril*
Various; Madalena De Melo *sng*
Interstate Records

- **Glass** *Glassworks* – Opening
Philip Glass Ensemble / Michael Riesman
Sony Classical
- **JS Bach** Double Violin Concerto in D minor, BWV1043 – Vivace
Itzhak Perlman, Pinchas Zukerman *vns*
ECO / Daniel Barenboim
EMI/Warner Classics
- **Beethoven** String Quartet No 15, Op 132 – Molto adagio
Artemis Quartet
Erato
- **Traditional**
I am a poor wayfaring stranger
Andreas Scholl *counterten*
Orpheus Chamber Orchestra
Decca
- **Britten** (arr Buckley) *Corpus Christi Carol*
Jeff Buckley *sngtr/gtr*
Columbia Legacy
- **Fanshawe** African Sanctus – Kyrie, 'Call to Prayer'
Ambrosian Singers; ensemble /
Orwain Arwel Hughes
Philips
- **Shostakovich** Symphony No 5 – Moderato
LSO / Mstislav Rostropovich
LSO Live
- **Villa-Lobos** *Bachianas Brasileiras No 5 – Aria (Cantilena)*
Victoria de los Angeles *sop* Orchestre National de la Radiodiffusion Française / Heitor Villa-Lobos
Ginkgo Classical

B-A-C-H is best

Rebecca Schmid gathers together some of the musical tributes to the great JSB

Homages to JS Bach might seem clichéd following the many transcriptions of his keyboard music. But his contrapuntal mastery and forward-looking harmonies have persisted as wide-ranging sources of inspiration. The B-A-C-H motive creates the basis for the tone row of Anton Webern's Third String Quartet and resurfaces in ghostly form in Sofia Gubaidulina's string quartet *Reflections on the Theme B-A-C-H*. Alfred Schnittke takes a more sarcastic approach in his serial *Quasi una Sonata* for violin and chamber orchestra. Arvo Pärt's last collage-style work, *Credo*, resolves itself in the tonality of the C major Prelude from the *Well-Tempered Clavier*, and Francesco Tristano juxtaposes the C minor Prelude with a techno beat in *LudePre (Version)*.

Villa-Lobos considered Bach a 'universal folkloric source', adapting his compositional technique to native Brazilian music in the *Bachianas Brasileiras* suite. Charles Koechlin, in his *Fugue sur le nom de Bach*, lends a French touch with sumptuous woodwinds and atmospheric dissonance. Ferruccio Busoni, better known for his Bach transcriptions than his own music, completed the unfinished final *Contrapunctus* from Bach's *The Art of Fugue*



Sofia Gubaidulina: one of many inspired by Bach

in his *Fantasia contrappuntistica*; I have included the third version for four hands. Luciano Berio couldn't help but orchestrate part of the unfinished work in *Contrapunctus XIX*, and Max Richter succumbs in the looped string duo *Contrapunctus I*.

- **Webern** String Quartet, Op 28
Alban Berg Quartet
Teldec/Warner Classics
- **Gubaidulina** *Reflections on the Theme B-A-C-H*
Quatuor Molinari
ATMA Classique
- **Schnittke** *Quasi una sonata*
Gidon Kremer *vn* COE / Yuri Smirnov
DG
- **Pärt** *Credo for Piano Solo, Mixed Choir and Orchestra*
Hélène Grimaud *pf* Swedish RSO / Esa-Pekka Salonen
DG
- **Francesco Tristano** *LudePre (Version)*
Carl Craig
Sony Masterworks
- **Villa-Lobos** *Bachianas Brasileiras No 1 – Introdução*
RPO / Enrique Batiz
Warner Classics
- **Koechlin** *Offrande musicale sur le nom de B-A-C-H*
South West German RSO / Heinz Holliger
Hänssler Classic
- **Busoni** *Fantasia contrappuntistica*
Viktoria Postnikova *pf*
Warner Apex
- **Berio** *Contrapunctus XIX*
Orchestra Sinfonica di Milano Giuseppe Verdi / Riccardo Chailly
Decca
- **Richter** *Contrapunctus I*
Max Richter
Sony Masterworks



The playlists for this feature were compiled in conjunction with

Qobuz, the music streaming service. You can listen to the playlists at gramophone.co.uk/playlists



Jocelyn Pook's diverse creative output is in tune with the breadth of her listening habits

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Sir Simon Rattle. Photo © Stefan Rabold.

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PERFORMANCES & EVENTS

There's plenty of live music on offer this month, both in the concert hall and online, from a piano recital in an East Lothian church to dance performances in a Victorian warehouse

Ulster Hall & BBC Radio 3

Ulster Orchestra Summer Invitation Concert, August 21

The final of the six Summer Invitation Concerts celebrating the music of the Southern Hemisphere features Nicholas Braithwaite conducting an eclectic programme: Anthony Ritchie's *A Bugle Will Do*, Malcolm Williamson's *Our Man in Havana* Suite, Douglas Lilburn's *A Song of Islands*, Graeme Koehne's *Tivoli Dances*, and Peter Sculthorpe's *Irkanda IV*, featuring the Ulster Orchestra's Leader, Tamás Kocsis, as soloist. All six concerts are free, and will be broadcast on BBC Radio 3. ulsterorchestra.com; bbc.co.uk/radio3

Royal Albert Hall & BBC Radio 3

BBC Prom 55, SWR Symphony Orchestra, August 26

Due to funding cuts, the Southwest German Radio Symphony Orchestra will merge with the Stuttgart Radio Symphony Orchestra next year, making this the last Proms appearance before it's disbanded. Director François-Xavier Roth will conduct a programme featuring Boulez's *...explosante-fixe...* which turns the structural conventions of classical music upside down by beginning with its most complex material before gradually moving towards its primary, original source. Also on the programme is Ligeti's *Lontano* and Bartók's virtuoso Concerto for Orchestra. You can hear it live on BBC Radio 3, and online thereafter. bbc.co.uk/proms; bbc.co.uk/radio3

Royal Albert Hall, BBC Radio 3 & BBC Four

BBC Prom 68, Yo-Yo Ma, September 5

Yo-Yo Ma performs all six of the Bach Suites in one late-night Prom. These are works that perhaps epitomise music-making at its most pure level, and Ma's own relationship with them stretches back over decades of performances and recordings. Given that it'll undoubtedly be a stamina test for the audience too, the BBC has made sure there are multiple ways to enjoy the Prom remotely. It will be broadcast live on Radio 3, filmed for broadcast on BBC Four on September 10, and is also available to listen to and watch online. bbc.co.uk/proms; bbc.co.uk/radio3

Royal Concertgebouw & online

Tomáš Netopil conducts the Essen Philharmonic Orchestra, September 6

Kodály's *Dances of Galánta* and Debussy's *Prélude à L'après-midi d'un faune* are on the

EVENT OF THE MONTH



Village Underground & online

City Of London Sinfonia, September 22

East London's renovated Victorian warehouse venue is the setting for 'CLOSer: Debussy, Copland and Dance', with each musical work

being accompanied by a live classical contemporary/urban dance performance. The programme both starts and ends with Debussy's *Prélude à L'après-midi d'un faune*, presented in two contrasting dance interpretations. The evening also features Bach's Solo Cello Suites (transcribed for clarinet and performed by conductor Michael Collins), Rameau's *Pygmalion* dance suite and Copland's *Appalachian Spring*. Those wanting more background information can attend a pre-concert talk. Part of the CLS's 'RE:Imagine' 2015-16 season, the concert will be streamed live on the CLS website, where it will remain available for seven days after the concert. cityoflondonsinfonia.co.uk/CLOSer/

programme for this 'Sunday Morning Concert'. Turn up in person and you can go on a guided tour of the concert hall afterwards or even have a champagne brunch in the Pleinoyer. You can tune in through the Live section of the Concertgebouw's website; concerts are streamed live in high definition, you don't have to log in, it's free to view, you can pause during viewing, and if you miss the concert then it's available for up to three days afterwards. concertgebouw.nl

Dunbar Parish Church & BBC Radio 3

Steven Osborne solo piano recital at the Lammermuir Festival, September 16

Steven Osborne, who becomes the first patron of East Lothian's Lammermuir Festival in September, presents a stylistically contrasting programme of Schubert (No 6 of *Six Moments musicaux*) and Rachmaninov - four Impromptus and excerpts from his *Etudes-tableaux* Opp 33 & 39. The concert is one of several Lammermuir events broadcast on BBC Radio 3 from October 27-30 at 1pm. lammermuirfestival.co.uk; bbc.co.uk/radio3

Beethovenhalle & WDR TV

Saraste conducts the WDR Sinfonieorchester at Beethovenfest, Bonn, September 17

'Variations' is the theme of this year's festival, and one highlight will be a concert devoted to one of Beethoven's most reverent fans, Brahms. Gerhard Oppitz performs Brahms's First Piano Concerto as part of a programme that includes the First Symphony and his *Variations on a Theme by Haydn*. The concert is broadcast live on WDR TV - you can watch by logging on to the WDR link below, and

clicking on Livestream. The Watch & Listen section of the Beethovenfest's own website is also worth exploring: more than half the concerts are recorded for radio broadcast (either live or pre-recorded). Furthermore, excerpts of concerts are available as podcasts, either via RSS feed or in iTunes.

www1.wdr.de/fernsehen; en.beethovenfest.de

Royal Opera House & UK cinemas

The Royal Ballet in *Romeo and Juliet*, September 19 - December 2

Any chance to see Kenneth MacMillan's groundbreaking production of *Romeo and Juliet* is always worth grabbing, and if you can't get to Covent Garden then you can watch it live at a cinema near you on September 22. Koen Kessels conducts the Orchestra of the Royal Opera House in Prokofiev's famous score, with Boston-born Sarah Lamb dancing Juliet, and English Principal Rupert Pennefather as Romeo. The live cinema event begins at 7.15pm, while the 'encore' is on Sunday September 27 at 2pm. roh.org.uk; roh.org.uk/cinemas

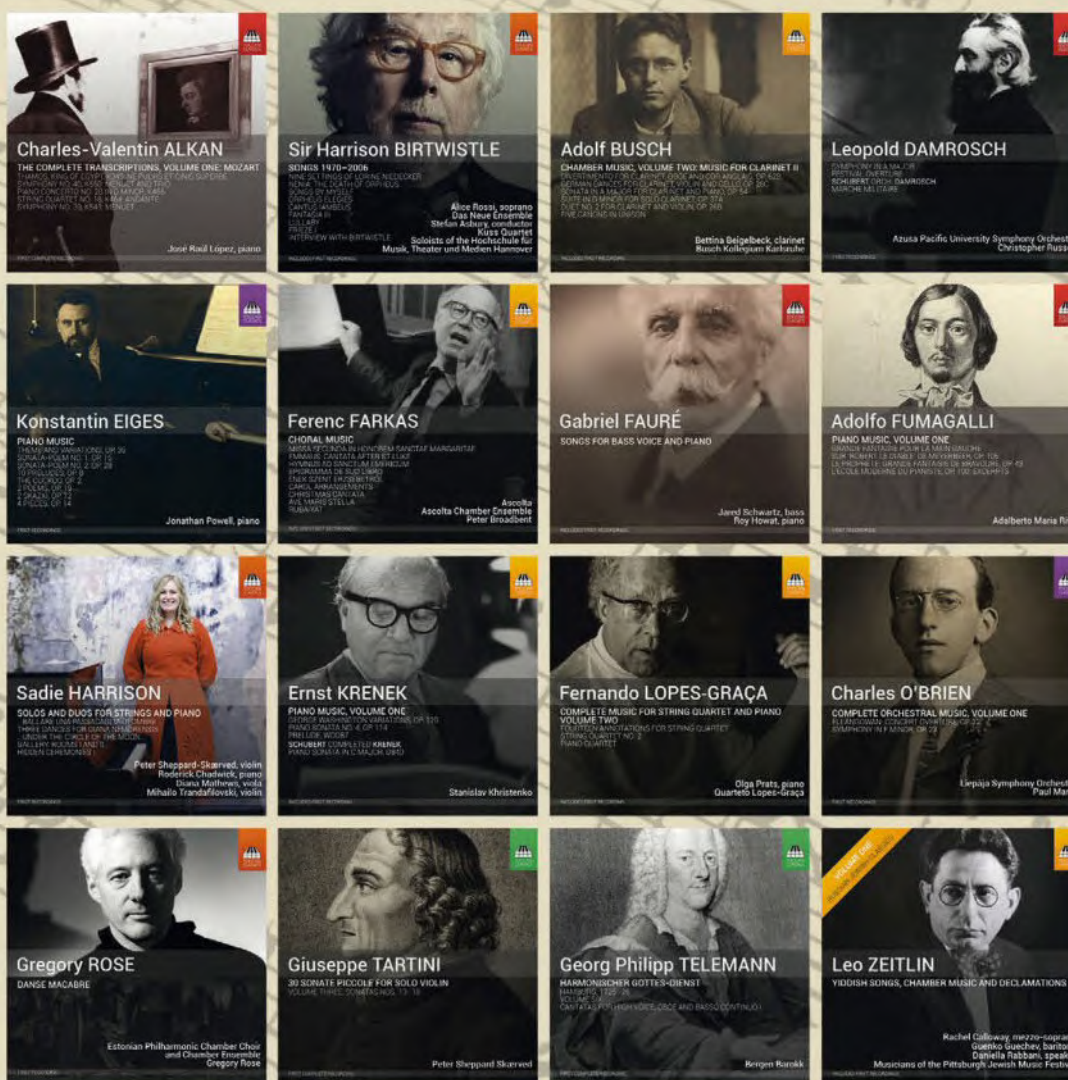
St John's, Smith Square & BBC Radio 3

Tallis Scholars' 2000th concert, September 21

The Tallis Scholars were founded in 1973 by Peter Phillips, who directs their 2000th concert in what's to be a highlight within the London International A Cappella Choir Competition. Broadcast live on BBC Radio 3, the programme features Sheppard's *Missa Cantate*, Taverner's *Leroy Kyrie* and Gabriel Jackson's *Ave Dei patris filia*, plus works by Byrd: *Infelix ego*, *Ye Sacred Muses* and *Tribue, Domine*. sjss.org.uk; bbc.co.uk/radio3

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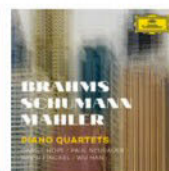
THIS MONTH An excellent all-in-one network audio device, a headphone/amp combination with a twist and some hints for newcomers to computer audio.

Andrew Everard, Audio Editor

SEPTEMBER TEST DISCS



The SCO's Mozart set (Linn) sounds delicious in 192kHz/24-bit, with soprano Elizabeth Watts captured in sparkling fashion.



This DG set of piano quartets by Brahms, Mahler and Schumann has a particularly vibrant 'live' sound in 96kHz/24-bit.

Desktop audio and the return of a high-end name

Denon thinks small with its latest models, while Luxman thinks big with the arrival of its latest amplification



Thanks to the rise of computer connectivity and storage of music, desktop audio is one of the big growth areas in hi-fi right now.

Denon is clearly 'on trend' with the arrival of its latest components, which are very much serious audio miniaturised. The £449 PMA-50 amplifier has been around for a little while, complete with digital amplification delivering 50W into 4 ohms, a USB input able to handle content up to 'double-DSD' quality, Bluetooth, and a novel display allowing it to be used in conventional horizontal orientation or stood on its end to take up less desk space.

Now it's been joined by the £329 DCD-50 CD player/transport **1**, with matching styling, analogue and digital outputs, 32-bit/192kHz digital-to-analogue conversion and – like the amplifier – a choice of black or silver finishes. It also has the same display technology as the amplifier, so again can be used vertically, and the two can be controlled by a single handset.

From the compact to the heavyweight, and Japanese company Luxman is celebrating its 90th anniversary this year with the arrival of the D-06u CD/SACD player, C-700u pre-amplifier and M-700u power amplifier, each priced at £6995 **2**. The player uses a proprietary disc transport and Burr-Brown digital-

to-analogue conversion, and as well as playing discs has a USB input able to handle PCM data up to 32-bit/384kHz and DSD up to 5.64MHz. The digital-to-analogue conversion upsamples all content to 384kHz and offers three digital filter options, and the player is isolated from vibration by the use of cast-iron feet.

The C-700u pre-amplifier uses the latest version of Luxman's ODNF (Only Distortion Negative Feedback) topology, and offers tone and loudness adjustments (bypassable using a 'line straight' button) plus a novel display with a three-stage zoom, allowing it to be read with ease across the room. (The same display is also used on the D-06u.) The partnering M-700u uses the same amplifier design and delivers 120W per channel into 8 ohms, 210W into 4 ohms and an instantaneous output of 840W into 1 ohm. The stereo amp, complete with its striking front-panel power meters, can also be bridged into mono at the flick of a switch, in which setting it delivers 420W into 8 ohms.

The polar opposite of the huge Luxman power amp, which tips the scales at 27.5kg, is the eminently pocketable AK Jr personal player from Astell & Kern, which sells for £399 and weighs just 93g **3**. With its aluminium casework tapering from 8.9mm down to 6.9mm, and sporting a 3.1in

touchscreen display, the AK Jr has 64GB of internal memory, expandable to 128GB using a microSD card, and will play content at up to DSD resolution. The onboard headphone amp delivers an impressive 1.95V RMS, so it's able to drive almost any headphones with no need for external amplification, and the player has built-in Bluetooth for wireless playback via suitable headphones and speakers.

Not quite so compact but still pocketable (ish) is the new Creative FFree Bluetooth speaker, selling for £80 **4**. It too has Bluetooth 4.0 technology and integrated media playback from microSD storage, and can also connect directly to suitable devices via USB for lossless playback. Twin passive radiators boost the bass output, the internal lithium ion battery gives up to 10 hours' use between charges, and the splashproof FFree comes in a choice of black or white.

Finally, another new CD player, this time from British company Icon Audio and using an all-triode valve Class A output stage. The £995 Icon Audio CDX2 **5** uses a top-loading transport with a heavy disc clamp to stabilise playback, and 192kHz/24-bit upsampling digital-to-analogue conversion in the all-hardwired circuitry. A range of customisations are available, including a choice of output valves, capacitors and resistors to further enhance performance. **6**

● REVIEW PRODUCT OF THE MONTH

Novafidelity X40

Upgraded network ripper/server provides more than a taste of the high end

Just over a year ago these pages featured the all-in-one Cocktail Audio X30 (8/14), able to rip CDs, store and serve music, act as a network client for offboard music storage and even provide access to internet radio, not to mention having a built-in FM radio tuner. With its onboard amplification providing a 'just add speakers' solution, it looked like an ideal way into computer-stored music, as indeed did the more compact – and even more affordable – X12 model from sister brand Novafidelity, which was tested at the beginning of this year (3/15).

Both products aim to lead the music collector from CD into the new world of content stored for instant access on hard drives, and to do so while keeping the user well within his or her comfort zone. Once set up, using extensive menu options of excellent clarity, they make copying ('ripping') a CD as simple as popping it into a slot and waiting for the unit to do its thing, while accessing stored music is a matter of scrolling through folders, artists, titles or whatever to find the track or entire album you want.

As I suggested in the X12 review, what Novafidelity is offering is 'a one-box computer music system – without the computer', and I am sure the removal of the need for a connection from PC to hi-fi will come as a great relief to many a potential buyer. All you need is a conventionally proportioned component – full-size in the case of the X30, mini-system-style for the X12 – and a pair of speakers, though either unit can also be used as a source into a normal hi-fi amplifier, system or AV receiver.



NOVAFIDELITY X40

Type Hard-disk music ripper/server/player

Price from £1199 (see text for add-ons)

Available storage capacity 256GB-4TB

Sources CD (with ripping functions), internal HDD/SSD, USB/network storage, internet/FM radio, streaming services

Inputs Line analogue, moving-magnet phono, optical/coaxial digital, aux in on front panel

Outputs Fixed/variable analogue on RCA

and XLR sockets, optical, coaxial and AES/EBU digital, headphones, HDMI for monitor/TV

Other connections Ethernet, Wi-Fi (with optional adaptor), 3xUSB, FM antenna

File formats PCM-based audio up to 24-bit/384kHz, DXD 24-bit/352.8kHz, DSD64/2.8MHz, DSD128/5.6MHz

Accessories supplied Remote handset

Dimensions (WxHxD) 43.5x9.9x32.5cm

sygnifi.co.uk

With its most recent addition, the X40, Novafidelity offers a different way of thinking. This is a source component, pure and simple – and one with truly audiophile aspirations. At prices starting from £1199

'The real action is deep in the electronics...which enhances overall sound quality. The Novafidelity is pretty much future-proof'

for a basic version, to which you can add your own choice of hard-drive storage via a slot-in caddy to the rear, the X40 is around 50 per cent more expensive than the X30 in the same configuration, yet lacks the internal amplification of the lower-priced model.

So what's going on? Well, the newer model may have lost the 50W-per-channel

'dynamic power' digital amplification (which was OK but not a patch on using the unit into a decent stereo amp); but in its place has come a whole raft of sound-enhancing upgrades, not the least of which is the provision of balanced analogue outputs as well as the standard RCA sockets. In practical terms it's also gained a useful moving-magnet phono input stage, meaning that you can now connect a turntable directly to it in order to archive vinyl records to its hard-disk storage at up to 24-bit/192kHz resolution, and then of course play them through a connected amplifier and speakers on demand or even stream them out to other audio players on your home network.

However, the real action here is deep in the electronics, where the X30's Burr-Brown PCM1792a digital-to-analogue conversion has been replaced

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SUGGESTED PARTNERS

With its all-in-one capabilities, the X40 can sit at the heart of a high-quality system...

IPAD MINI

Using a tablet such as the iPad Mini, free apps such as PlugPlayer or Kinsky can be used to 'drive' the X40's playback.



CAMBRIDGE CXA80 AMPLIFIER

To make the most of the X40's balanced outputs, choose an amplifier such as the Cambridge CXA80, reviewed last month.



by the highly regarded ESS Sabre32 Reference converter, which not only enhances overall sound quality but also allows the X40 to play DSD64/2.8MHz and DSD128/5.6MHz content, as well as to handle DXD at 24bit/352.8KHz and – if you can find anything thus encoded – PCM at up to 32bit/384KHz. I think it's safe to say that all this makes the Novafidelity pretty much future-proof.

In place of the X30's 700MHz computer-type CPU, used as the brains of the unit, the X40 has an XMOS 32bit/500MIPS digital signal processor. Other sound-enhancing design features include the use of a toroidal transformer to keep internal electrical noise under control, and a thicker aluminium front panel as part of more vibration-resistant casework.

Stepping up from the 'bare-bones' basic specification, to which you can add either 3.5in or 2.5in HDD or SSD storage, the X40 comes in a number of preconfigured versions: a 2TB conventional hard drive adds £100 and a 4TB version is £1399, while versions with solid-state storage are £1399 for 256GB, £1499 for 500GB and £1899 for 1TB. The main advantages of the SSD versions are lower noise and vibration, plus faster access when searching or copying content – which you can do from attached USB thumb drives or full-size hard drives, also usable for memory expansion.

All versions come in a choice of silver or black, have the same 5in TFT LCD display screen plus an HDMI video out to allow information to be shown on a TV or monitor, and can be controlled either by the handset provided, or using a browser interface on a computer or a variety of third-party smartphone/tablet apps.

PERFORMANCE

Having previously reviewed a couple of these Novafidelity/Cocktail Audio products – the two brands seem interchangeable in various markets – I was pretty sure what to expect from the X40. However, I think it's fair to say that this upmarket version of the basic design far exceeded my expectations when it came to the sound quality it can deliver.

Network can be either wired or wireless – the latter using a £29 add-on

Wi-Fi adapter in one of the rear-panel USB sockets – and you can set the analogue outputs to either fixed level (for use into a conventional amplifier) or variable (when using it into a power amplifier or active speakers). I opted for wired networking, as this gives the most stable connection, and fixed level into the balanced inputs of an Arcam A49 amplifier. The X40 is definitely up to the task of playing music all the way up to the highest resolution into amps of the Arcam's calibre, with a well-detailed and powerful sound able to make clear the advantages of higher resolution while still making a very good job of CD quality and below.

Playing the Scottish Chamber Orchestra's set of Mozart overtures and arias, in a 24-bit/192kHz Linn download (7/15), the Novafidelity delights with a sound combining delicacy and scale, and a gloriously clear rendition of soloist Elizabeth Watts. There's a certain drive to the music, plus real three-dimensionality to the sound, making for a thrilling listening experience.

But it doesn't take a brand-new recording to hear what the X40 can do. With some of the old Mercury Living Presence sets from decades back, ripped from their SACD release into DSD files, that same sense of musical communication is just as palpable as it is with a modern double-DSD or DXD, scarce though those are.

The Novafidelity has the clarity to make a good orchestral recording sound rich but at the same time richly detailed, while the way it presents a solo voice or instrument with piano accompaniment is equally convincing, and more than matches the performance on offer from some better-known 'hi-fi names'. Add to that the convenience of the X40, the clarity of the pictorial menus – once you familiarise yourself with them – and the simplicity of copying CDs to the internal storage, and you have a machine able to make a very convincing case for converting a CD collection to one that's available at your fingertips. That the manufacturer has managed to keep all that user appeal while also adding superb sound quality is doubly impressive. **G**

Or you could try...

With the X40 and its junior stablemates, Novafidelity is expanding the market for simplified network storage and streaming devices, as I suggest in this month's Audio Essay. If you wanted to try this approach without spending as much as the price of this player, the obvious place to start would be the company's more affordable X30 player/recorder, which also has built-in amplification, if not quite the X40's sound quality, or even the entry-level X12, which is around £500 complete with 1TB of internal storage and can be expanded up to 4TB.



Bluesound Vault

An alternative approach, shorn of the display found on the X40 and some of its other features, is the Bluesound Vault, reviewed in April. It has integrated CD ripping, and can handle high-resolution music and internet radio. It sells for around £900.

bluesound.com



Naim HDX

Unashamedly upmarket but offering similar facilities to the X40 is Naim's flagship CD ripping/storage solution, the HDX. It's been on sale for some years now and will cost you around £5300, depending on the storage option you choose – but as well as being a superb player in its own right, it will also act as a server for any other network players you have in your home.

naimaudio.com

● REVIEW MUSICAL FIDELITY V90-BHA/MF-200B

A perfect pairing

Balanced headphones and amp provide a compelling listen

As I have noted in these pages in the past, headphones are proving one of the consistent growth areas in the hi-fi market. Once a 'distress purchase', bought only to replace the earbuds supplied with personal players or to allow continued listening to one's music in the face of family pressure, they've now turned into a medium of choice for many a listener.

Although I'd still choose a decent pair of speakers for serious listening, I can see the appeal of headphones. Not only are they less obtrusive than having a pair of speakers set up wherever you choose to listen but, in conjunction with a good personal player, they also allow you to enjoy your music almost anywhere you want, and can often deliver levels of performance unobtainable from similarly priced loudspeakers.

In an age where many of us don't have the luxury of retiring to a dedicated 'listening room' – the old image of the 'man cave' or 'den', dedicated to the audio system, is long gone – it's hardly surprising that the headphone market is booming and that manufacturers are seeking more ways of improving this personal listening. Or, if you're cynical, ways to sell us more equipment.

'In an age where the idea of a "man cave" is long gone, it's no surprise the headphone market is positively booming'

The dedicated headphone amplifier may seem like just such a ploy but in fact it definitely has a place. Not only can it be optimised for the task of driving a pair of headphones, rather than just being an adjunct to a conventional hi-fi amplifier, but it's also possible to use just a headphone amplifier if that's all you want, rather than buying speaker-driving capability you don't really require.

Headphone amplifiers come in a variety of types and sizes. The Musical Fidelity V90-BHA we have here is a compact box with line and XLR inputs, a volume control and a 3.5mm stereo output, but it also has a four-pin mini-XLR to match the connector on the 1.3m cable fitted to the balanced version of the company's MF-200B headphones. You can buy the headphones and amplifier separately at

£250 each or buy both as a package and save yourself £50.

So why balanced working in a headphones system? Well, Musical Fidelity points out the ability of such a design to cancel out interference in the very low-level signals encountered in this kind of listening, while adding that the V90-BHA/MF200B works as a true dual-mono system for improved stereo separation, as well as giving effectively twice the power and half the impedance of a conventional single-ended system, meaning the headphones are driven better. On a practical level, the design also has the advantage of locking connectors on both balanced inputs and output, the latter avoiding the familiar tendency of headphone plugs to work loose after repeated insertion/removal cycles.

The amplifier is a little unusual by the standards of most current headphone amplifiers in that it's just that – a headphone amplifier, rather than one designed to double as a digital-to-analogue converter or a pre-amplifier to connect to a power amp or active speakers. It's powered by an offboard mains adaptor, has a selector switch to choose between the RCA and XLR inputs, and a power switch and volume control on the front – and that's about it. The MF-200B headphones take the established design of the MF-200 model, complete with its 40mm closely matched drive units with neodymium magnets and 'micro-vented' closed-back and acoustically inert earpieces, and adds to it the balanced connections, with completely separate wiring to each channel, and a thicker, more heavily insulated cable.

PERFORMANCE

Having to hand a pair of the standard MF-200 headphones, I was able to make close comparisons between balanced and single-ended working, and quickly established that, whichever kind of headphones you use, the V90-BHA headphone amplifier sounds very good indeed when connected using conventional RCA phono cables but really rather special when using its balanced inputs.

Using an SACD/CD player with both kinds of output, I was able to make swift changes between the two connections. Quite apart from the balanced operation giving more level and greater clarity, it was readily



MUSICAL FIDELITY V90-BHA/MF-200B

Type Balanced headphone amplifier and headphones

Price £250 each unit, £450 when purchased together

Inputs Analogue audio on RCA phono and XLR sockets, 1.3mm DC power in

Outputs 3.5mm and four-pin XLR sockets

Power output 0.75Wpc into 32 ohms

Accessories supplied 12v 500mA DC power supply

V-90BHA dimensions (WxHxD)

17x4.7x11.7cm

musicalfidelity.com

apparent that it also had more authority and a better sense of three-dimensionality. However, when connecting the balanced headphones things really come together, whichever input you use on the amplifier.

The difference is all about grip and control. The standard MF-200 headphones sound refined and mature, with a good combination of bass weight and midband/treble detail, but switching to the balanced set-up adds a small but very valuable extra dose of snap to the sound that really brings the stereo effect into focus, moving the sound from an 'in the head' experience to one where it's possible to close one's eyes and 'see' performers before you. Add to that more extended dynamics, opening up and making the presentation entirely effortless, even when playing orchestral music with huge swings in level, and the beautiful rendition of instrumental and vocal textures, and you have a personal audio experience that's truly the equal of listening on very good speakers, and at a very sensible price.

Whatever your reason for needing headphones – choice or necessity – the Musical Fidelity V90-BHA/MF-200B system makes a very convincing case for keeping your music to yourself. **G**



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● ESSAY

New to computer audio? Start here...

If you've decided to store your music on hard drive for instant playback, the options can be confusing unless you have the right guidance to hand

You know where you are with a CD player – you put the CD in a drawer, press 'play' and you have sound. Yet to music enthusiasts of more than 30 years ago, used to cleaning records, lowering the stylus with (hopefully not too) trembling fingers and listening to the swish of the run-in grooves, even this simplicity seemed like some kind of black art.

The same goes with the present 'undiscovered country' – at least for many – of computer-stored music; and yet once you get the hang of it, you'll wonder how you put up with searching shelves for CDs, placing them in a player and then retreating to your favourite listening chair with a remote control to start playback. In this new world of audio, music is literally at your fingertips: with the click of a mouse or a tap on a tablet, you can find anything in your collection and have it playing in moments.

Of course, before all that happens you'll need to get your music where you can find it, and there are a number of ways to store your CDs – and even LPs – to make this happen. All involve the ripping of music to hard-drive storage – although high-quality music can also be bought and downloaded

'With the click of a mouse, you can find anything in your collection and have it playing in moments'

online from companies such as Qobuz, which has a particularly good classical range in CD-quality or better, as well as from an increasing number of labels' own websites.

How you go down the stored music route is up to you. The simplest way is to copy all your music to a computer, using a CD drive attached to the computer and the copying software built-in, and then connect that device directly to your hi-fi system using a digital-to-analogue converter able to take an input from a USB socket on your PC or Mac. Alternatively you can use your computer to copy the music to a NAS (or Network



Network-attached storage can serve music around the house – and it's easily expandable

Attached Storage) unit, which is a mini-computer with hard-disk storage designed to connect to your home network and make its contents available to network-connected audio devices. In either case, the computer should recognise the music you're copying from CD and 'tag' it for easy retrieval by artist, album and track using a digital look-up; when copying LPs, however (using a turntable connected to the computer), you'll have to input the tag data manually.

So, computer or NAS – which do you choose? It depends on your requirements. If you're going to do all your listening at your desk, the former route is perfectly adequate and affordable, though limited by the storage available in your computer. If, however, you want something more hi-fi-friendly, I'd suggest that the NAS way – which also has the advantage of allowing you to increase storage as your collection grows – is the one to take.

Why? Well, for several reasons, principal among which is that you don't need to have a computer switched on all the time you're listening (and also because it means you have dedicated storage for your music). Such devices have become ever more affordable, as has the hard-disk storage used within them, and such a set-up has the added advantage of allowing any device on your network – be it a dedicated music player or just a computer – to access and play all the music. So several

rooms can access your collection at the same time, each playing something different if required.

And as I said, network music players have never been so affordable. For just a few hundred pounds you can buy the Onkyo C-N7050 reviewed in these pages in June, combining as it does conventional CD playback with network-player capability, or should you wish you can really spend as much as you want on a network player. The machine I currently have as a reference has a price well into five figures – but then, I do have a stored music collection continuously outstripping the network storage capacity I have available, to the point where the staff in my local Amazon Collect+ delivery point worry for my health if I don't go in at least once a week!

On which subject, it's worth thinking ahead if you're buying a NAS device. Most have a number of 'bays' into which hard drives can be slotted, and of course drives are available in a range of capacities, so I'd suggest going for at least several terabytes of storage and a device with some spare bays for expansion, as it's amazing how quickly these things fill up.

However, there is a third way, as this month's main audio review illustrates. Combining ripping, storage, networking, simple operation and exceptional audio quality, a device like the Novafidelity X40 really is 'computer audio without tears'. And indeed without a computer. **G**

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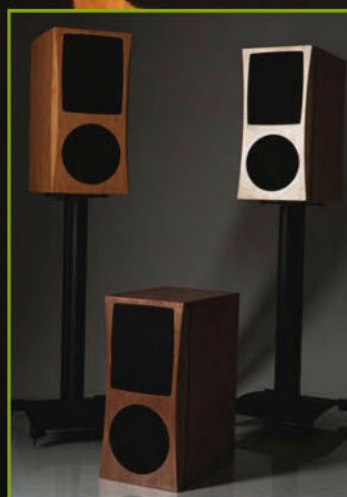
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Bring on Beethoven in Berlin!

Like many others, I was taken by surprise by the announcement that Kirill Petrenko is to be the next Chief Conductor of the Berlin Philharmonic. As *Gramophone's* Editor has said, only time will tell whether the choice stems from careful consideration and special insight. In the meantime, I wonder whether Sir Simon Rattle will be the first outgoing Chief Conductor of the Berlin Phil not to leave a recording of the Beethoven symphonies?

Edward Shepherd

Newcastle upon Tyne, UK

Rattle is conducting a complete Beethoven symphony cycle in October, which will be available via the Digital Concert Hall – Ed.



Surprise choice: Kirill Petrenko heads to Berlin in 2018

Schuller: master of jazz

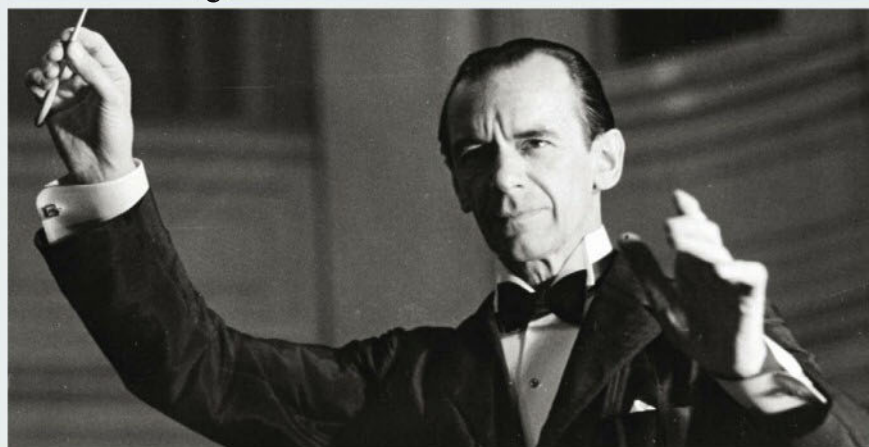
Your obituary of Gunther Schuller (August, page 124) doesn't do him justice. *The Swing Era: The Development of Jazz 1930-1945* (1989) is a masterly account of the development of jazz in its mature phase, dealing with bands and musicians in great depth and with acute musical insight. And *The Compleat Conductor* (1997) contains riveting descriptions of how various conductors approach works as varied as Beethoven's Fifth and Seventh Symphonies, Brahms's First and Fourth Symphonies, Strauss's *Till Eulenspiegel* and Ravel's *Daphnis et Chloé* Suite. It could well be the best book ever written about conducting.

Professor Roger Brown
Southampton, UK

In the mood for Moog

I spent hours in the late '60s and early '70s listening to 'Switched-On Bach' and I didn't find this a 'dubious achievement', as

Letter of the Month



Deeply moving: Malcolm Sargent's 1945 *Dream of Gerontius* remains a treasured memory for this reader

A vivid Dream of Gerontius from the past

April marked the 70th anniversary of the first complete recording of Elgar's *The Dream of Gerontius*. I witnessed the event at first hand, which took place from April 8-13, 1945, in Huddersfield Town Hall, with Dr Malcolm Sargent conducting the Huddersfield Choral Society and the LPO. Could an eight-year-old claim to have appreciated what was going on? I was deeply moved – I experienced a spiritual awakening at the choir's affirmation of 'Praise to the Holiest' and the lingering of Heddle Nash's frightened, dying and weak

voice shook this child on that day. I was hooked.

I had been taken there by my father, Hugh Frederic, and his own father, Frederic Walter, of the HCS Committee. I remember acute embarrassment as my elders stood up twice to demand a restart and also being patted on the head by Dr Malcolm himself!

Ted Gadsby, via email

The first recording is available on Testament (SBT2025 – 2/94) – Ed.

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Please send letters responding to articles in this issue for consideration for publication in the Awards issue by August 24. *Gramophone* reserves the right to edit all letters for publication.

**PRESTO
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some have suggested and as referred to by William Yeoman in his review of 'Bach to Moog' (August, page 38). Walter Carlos's painstakingly crafted realisations were a source of joy and delight: the rhythmic impulses of Bach's dance were laid out for a plethora of electronically contrived voices, perhaps less instrumentally recognisable than the stops of an organ, but certainly great fun. To a teenager coming from the synthesised prog rock of Emerson Lake and Palmer, this was an entry into the higher echelons of art. Yeoman goes on to say that the album 'altered the course of

musical history' and for that I remain in debt to the artistry of Walter Carlos.

Barry Borman
Middlesex, UK

Editorial comments

Referring to Jeremy Nicholas's review of two-piano Liszt (July, page 54), the *Grand Concert Piece on Mendelssohn's Songs Without Words* was actually premiered at the Hôtel de Ville, Paris, on April 9, 1835, by Liszt and Mlle Vial; and the Piano Duo Genova & Dimitrov have been together for 20 years.

OBITUARIES

A much-respected critic; a celebrated tenor; a Baroque harpsichordist; a German viola player; a Czech pianist

EDWARD GREENFIELD

*Music critic and longtime
Gramophone contributor*

Born July 3, 1928

Died July 1, 2015



Ted, as he was known to everyone aside from his readers (and for generations of *Gramophone* readers he was 'EG') was born in Westcliff-on-Sea in Essex.

His father was a labour exchange manager, who had met Ted's mother, a clerk, through his work. After attending Westcliff High School for Boys, and following two years of National Service (during which time he formed a lifelong friendship with another great *Gramophone* critic, John Steane), he went up to Trinity Hall, Cambridge, where he further nurtured his love for music as well as becoming involved in politics, both of the Cambridge Union and the Labour Party variety.

He began his journalistic career in 1953 as a political writer for the *Manchester Guardian*; he took up reviewing recordings for the paper in 1955 (he was later appointed *The Guardian's* Chief Music Critic in 1977, retiring in 1993). In 1960 he was invited by *Gramophone's* Editor Anthony Pollard and Senior Reviewer Alec Robertson to start reviewing for these pages, and thus began a relationship with the magazine that saw him become one of its longest-serving contributors. His first *Gramophone* review was of Schubert's *Great C* major Symphony, from the Boston Symphony Orchestra under Charles Munch. Subsequent writing was to encompass books about Puccini, the soprano Joan Sutherland, and the conductor, composer and pianist André Previn; for many decades he was also co-author of *The Penguin Guide*.

Throughout his long career Ted met, interviewed and formed friendships with many of the leading figures from the music world (and from politics too, including Prime Minister Edward Heath), many of whom were to feature in his book *Portrait Gallery – A Life in Classical Music*, published last year. This, together with his regular attendance at recording sessions – including, for example, that of

Jacqueline du Pré's classic EMI recording of the Elgar Cello Concerto – gave him a valuable insight into the workings of the recording industry and the people behind the scenes, which richly informed so much of what he wrote. In 1993 he was given a Special Achievement Award by *Gramophone* for his contribution to music criticism, and the following year he received an OBE.

Ted was also a characterful broadcaster, both on BBC Radio 3 and the World Service. A contributor to the Saturday morning 'Building a Library' feature (a good discipline for him with its requirement of a single 'winner'), Ted started during the period when the feature would be broadcast live (he used to recount with great relish the occasion when, live on air, he tripped over the phrase 'Kletzki's fluctuations' and delivered one of the first outings of the 'F' word on Radio 3!).

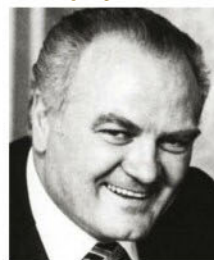
Ted's recent book opened with what he termed his 'credo', his description of the approach he followed throughout his life as a music journalist, in which he argued that the role of a critic (a word, incidentally, that he felt unfortunately loaded, preferring, if one were to have existed, 'a crisp word meaning "one who appreciates"') was to encourage others to share in music's enjoyment, to be 'an evangelist'. As he put it: 'If anyone has been encouraged to go out to listen to music after reading what I have written, that for me is the response I cherish most of all.' Perhaps his greatest legacy is that, on so many countless occasions and for so many countless people, that has undoubtedly been true.

JON VICKERS

Tenor

Born October 29, 1926

Died July 10, 2015



The Canadian tenor Jon Vickers has died following a long battle with Alzheimer's disease: he was 88 years old. Celebrated for his intense performances of the Heldentenor repertoire, he was a major figure on the world's stages for more than three decades.

Born in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, Vickers studied at the Royal Conservatory

in Canada on a scholarship. He joined the company of the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, in 1957. Early roles here included Riccardo in Verdi's *Un ballo in maschera*. In 1958 he sang Giasone opposite Maria Callas's Medea in Cherubini's opera in Dallas (a live recording exists). He made his Bayreuth debut the same year as Siegmund, a role he very much made his own, and in 1964 he returned as Parsifal. He made his Metropolitan Opera debut in 1960 as Canio (*Pagliacci*): in all he would sing 277 performances at the New York house in 17 roles (including Don José, Radames, Erik, Herman, Samson, Otello, Peter Grimes, Enée and Parsifal) across 22 seasons.

Vickers's recorded legacy was extensive, including the tenor part for Thomas Beecham's *Messiah* ('You're damn good, Vickers,' shouted Sir Thomas as the tape ran – thereby ruining the take!) as well as key roles in his repertoire: Florestan, Tristan, Siegmund and Otello (all with Herbert von Karajan, who was a great admirer), and Enée (Berlioz's *The Trojans*) for Sir Colin Davis, with whom he also recorded *Peter Grimes*. Benjamin Britten was said not to have cared for Vickers's assumption of the role, maybe finding the intensity and near-psychotic nature of the character too much. Reviewing the recording in *Gramophone* in March 1979, Edward Greenfield commented: 'In one vital, if rather obvious respect, the Grimes of Vickers is dramatically more convincing than that of Pears, for Sir Peter always remains an intellectual (as it seems) among village folk. Putting it crudely, with him Grimes is not so recognisably a rough fisherman of local stock, rather a fish-out-of-water who, if not a middle-class intruder, ought to have been. Vickers, as might have been expected, gives us a portrait of just such a rough fisherman... It is he as much as Davis, I suspect, who dictates the extremely slow tempi for many of the important solos.'

Vickers also made a powerful recitalist, leaving a searing recording of Schubert's *Winterreise* which divided critical opinion. In a superb *Reputations* article in November 2004, Richard Osborne explored his voice and critics' responses to it: 'The Vickers voice was instantly recognisable; no one sounded remotely like him. Such comparisons as were made, were

made with Caruso. "This is marvellous, perhaps the most Caruso-like singing... on disc since the death of Caruso," wrote Andrew Porter of Vickers's debut recital, "Italian Opera Arias". John Steane pursued the comparison in *The Grand Tradition* [Timber Press: 1993]. "The kind of sound he will make...at the top of the stave is something other tenors cannot do (just as, though in a different way, Caruso had a quality around that part of the voice unlike anybody else)." Of Vickers's singing of "Cielo e mar" on that same recital disc, Steane observed: "It is the work of a big singer: voice, technique and spirit all proportionate."

ALAN CURTIS

Harpichordist, conductor and scholar
Born November 17, 1934
Died July 15, 2015



Alan Curtis, whose Baroque music recordings, especially of Handel operas, opened our ears to a 'new' repertoire, has died: he was 80. Born in Mason, Michigan, Curtis

received his PhD from the University of Illinois before studying in Amsterdam with Gustav Leonhardt. As a harpichordist he made a number of recordings of solo repertoire of music from the Baroque, including Bach's *Goldberg Variations*.

He taught at universities both in the States (at Berkeley) and in Europe while pursuing a parallel career as a performer. He conducted Handel's *Ariodante* at La Scala, Milan, in 1980 and would also oversee a production of Gluck's *Armida* in Bologna four years later – both major milestones in the revival of Baroque repertoire in Italy.

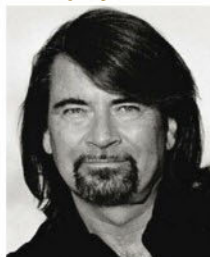
In 1979 he founded the ensemble Il Complesso Barocco and together they performed and recorded a huge amount of music, much of it of theatrical music by Handel. Complete opera recordings include Handel's *Lotario* (for DHM), *Floridante* (Archiv), *Alcina* (Archiv), *Ezio* (Virgin Classics and Archiv), *Tolomeo* (Archiv), *Ariodante* (Virgin Classics), *Deidamia* (Virgin Classics), *Giove in Argo* (Virgin Classics), *Rodelinda* (Archiv), *Giulio Cesare* (Naïve – Editor's Choice in March 2013), Vivaldi's *Ercole su'l Termodonte* (Dynamic) and *Motezuma* (Dynamic and Archiv).

Curtis and Il Complesso Barocco also collaborated on numerous recital albums with singers such as Patrizia Ciofi, Joyce DiDonato, Vesselina Kasarova,

Simone Kermes, Karina Gauvin and Marie-Nicole Lemieux.

FRIEDEMANN WEIGLE

Viola player and teacher
Born September 2, 1962
Died July 6, 2015



Friedemann Weigle, since 2007 the viola player of the Artemis Quartet, has died aged 53. Before joining the Artemis, he was a founder member of the Petersen Quartet,

with whom he played for 20 years. He was also a professor in Berlin, both at the University of the Arts and at the Hanns Eisler School of Music. His Artemis colleagues have paid tribute on their website to their 'colleague, companion and friend' whose viola sound – 'so special and so moving' – will 'remain with us for a very long time to come'.

IVAN MORAVEC

Pianist
Born November 9, 1930
Died July 27, 2015



Born in Prague, Ivan Moravec enjoyed a loyal following thanks to his recordings and relatively rare concert appearances. After study in his native Prague,

Moravec attended masterclasses in Arezzo given by Arturo Benedetti Michelangeli. A 1964 appearance with George Szell and the Cleveland Orchestra brought him international acclaim, as did his recordings for the Connoisseur Society label.

A noted Chopin interpreter, Moravec focused on the 'central' Romantic repertoire as well as music by Czech composers. Talking to Bryce Morrison for *Gramophone's* March 2004 issue, Moravec said: 'I have always taken my time and although I have learnt and practised a large repertoire...I have never felt ready to play most of it in public. I never had Arrau's or Ashkenazy's ability or willingness to play virtually everything.'

Moravec recorded for a number of labels including Nonesuch (Janáček), Dorian (solo Chopin, and Brahms and Schumann concertos) and Supraphon (for which he received a platinum disc for sales in excess of 250,000 units), and he was included in Philips's 'Great Pianists of the 20th Century' series.

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Ed Balls

The Labour politician on combining being Shadow Chancellor with learning the piano, and the terror of performing Schumann in concert

My parents met in a church choir in Norwich when they were 15, and singing in choirs was something they've done throughout their adult lives. So from the earliest I can remember there was music in the house, particularly choral music; I probably knew the key bits of *Messiah* and *Zadok the Priest* before I could really remember anything else.

I went to Keble College, Oxford, which then, as now, had a strong Anglican music tradition. During my time there, I heard the music of Howells for the first time, which has been a big thing for me ever since. It's not very often in music that you can say the 20th century was *the* century – but in Anglican cathedral music it was brilliant. When I was Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families, my office was opposite Westminster Abbey, which held a service for the department. I was allowed to choose the music, so I chose Dyson in D.

I started to play the violin from the age of seven, and played for about 15 years. I do have very good memories, though some bad ones too – in the school orchestra I scrubbed my way through a lot of operatic overtures and symphonies, which I didn't particularly enjoy. But I had a very good violin teacher who also played semi-professionally, and so we played a lot of Handel *concerti grossi* and a bit of *The Four Seasons*, and when I was 14 we did a performance of *The Lark Ascending* in which he played the solo part – there was no way I could get anywhere near to playing that, but I could play the second violin part in the orchestra, and the piece has remained one of my favourites.

The reality is that I liked playing music with other people, but was never really good enough to play on my own – that's the tragedy of the violin. A couple of times I played in quartets – 15 years ago I played in a string quartet with John Gapper and Gillian Tett, now top columnists for the *FT*. But I stopped doing that kind of thing for a long time – until I started playing the piano.

I started lessons just as I became Shadow Chancellor, in January 2011. I decided that, if I was going to do it, the only way to learn properly was to do the exams – to make myself play the scales and learn the techniques. I took Grade 1 that November. It was like being nine years old again – there was no concession to the fact that I was an adult. Afterwards I lent over to the examiner and said, 'It's much more stressful than the House of Commons' – and realised from his expression that you're not meant to have a conversation! We established a rule early on at home: when I start a new grade and choose my three pieces, I have to get the agreement of all the family on them – and Yvette has a veto – because they are going to hear them lots and lots of times...



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When I went to my interviews for university and work, this was the tape on my headphones that I'd listen to on the way there. It's something I associate with leaving home and with doing new things.

The Editor of *The Guardian*, Alan Rusbridger, asked me to take part in a concert in which different people played one of the 13 pieces of Schumann's *Kinderszenen*. It was on a Sunday morning the weekend after the Autumn Statement. I did a little bit of practice at 9am, then went and did the Murnaghan programme on Sky live at 10am, and then went back for the concert. I played the final piece, the reflective meditation on childhood, which from my point of view meant it was the slowest. But then you walk out, and you suddenly realise there are 500 people out there, and it's utterly quiet... My hands were really shaking, but I managed to get through it without making a mistake. But it was so difficult! The TV and politics were nothing compared to this.

I've since played the Schumann live on Jeremy Vine's programme, with seven million people listening to me. I've had so many letters from people I've never met, all writing about how they've started to play the piano in their fifties, sixties and seventies. These days when I get into a black cab, the driver won't say anything about politics – they'll turn round and say, 'How's the piano going?' 



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